

**A Grounded Theory Study of How Teachers and Administrators Use School
Improvement Plans to Make Change in their Schools**

by

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ABSTRACT

School improvement plans (SIPs) are used in most schools as a means to organize and implement efforts to make schools better. In general, most principals and staff see the development of an SIP as an essential part of every improvement effort within the school (Doud, 1995) and accept the SIP and its required processes as a best practice (Dunaway, Kim, & Szad, 2012). Alternatively, there is a plethora of literature that claims otherwise. Some research contends that SIPs fail to achieve what they intend to do (Anfara, Patterson, & Buehler, 2006). Other research is concerned about the research design of studies that attempt to determine the effectiveness of SIPs (Fernandez, 2011) by linking the quality of the SIP to student performance. Still other research calls for the need for more inquiry about the context of SIPs (Reezigt, 2001; Wikely & Murillo, 2005).

Using Crotty's (1998) knowledge framework, this study was positioned with constructionism as its epistemology, interpretivism and symbolic interaction (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010) as its theoretical perspective, constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2002) as its methodology, and intensive interviews, elicited responses, and content text analysis as its data collection methods that addressed the research question: *How do teachers and administrators utilize SIPs to make change in their schools?*

A constant comparative analysis approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) embedded across a four-phase data analysis framework was employed to make sense of the data. Numerous categories emerged from the data that were used to develop a substantive grounded theory about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their schools. The verisimilitude of the theory is then analyzed using several criteria (Piantanida, Tananis, & Grubs, 2004).

Overall, the findings from this research support the adoption of SIPs as a best practice and disrupt the discourse of the failure of SIPs prevalent in the literature. Its findings can be used as an alternative means to comment on the effectiveness of the SIP. Other key findings, implications and recommendations are made explicit as well as considerations for future research.

DEDICATION

To my big sister, Charlene Morrison (1959-2017), I dedicate this dissertation to you. Thank you for raising me when I was a kid, for modeling the importance of higher education, for showing courage and strength in ways I still cannot figure out, and most importantly for being kind and good not only to me but to everyone who knew you.

I finished it. I miss you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Improving the quality of education continues to be a central focus for many governments. With the promise of an educated citizenry come the hopes of increased economic development and the vision of a better quality of life. Some view careful planning that targets improvements in student achievement as a means to this end.

School improvement planning has become an integral part of several reform efforts in the province of New Brunswick. In recent years, a number of changes in provincial governments have occurred resulting in new provincial education plans each with the hope of making large scale improvements particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy achievement. School improvement planning in New Brunswick has been around for many years. It is currently used as a mechanism to align targets for improvement that either originate in district improvement plans or in the provincial education plan. In general, most school principals and staff see the development of a school improvement plan (SIP) as an essential part of every improvement effort within the school (Doud, 1995) and accept the SIP and its required processes as a best practice (Dunaway, Kim, & Szad, 2012). According to Bretschneider, Marc-Aurele, and Wu (2005), “the term ‘best practice’ implies that it is best when compared to any alternative course of action and that it is a practice designed to achieve some deliberative end” (p. 309).

This study used a constructivist grounded theory methodology to examine the utilization of school improvement plans (SIPs) and the changes that resulted. Specifically, the research question that was addressed in this study was this: *How do teachers and administrators utilize school improvement plans to make change in their schools?* The primary objective of this study was to develop a substantive theory that explains how

teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their schools. Secondary objectives include exploring and explaining: (a) what happens to these plans after they are written, (b) if the strategies within them ever got launched, and (c) if efforts to improve schools were realized, what form of school improvement took place.

In New Brunswick, current practices around school improvement planning vary. In many schools, the staff comes together to construct the SIP. In some cases, the SIP process begins by reviewing data and continues with deciding improvement goals. The selection of strategies to target improvement comes next, followed by decisions about who will be responsible for their implementation as well as who will monitor whether the strategies were implemented according to the plan. The SIP process in New Brunswick is not uniform and varies among districts and even among schools within districts. Beyond the differences in how the plans look according to various templates used, there are questions about what happens to these plans after they are written and if the strategies within them ever get launched. In addition, there are questions if efforts to improve schools are ever realized and if any form of school improvement takes place.

The difficulty in determining whether or not SIPs make a difference or “achieve some deliberative end” (Bretschneider et al., 2005, p. 309) is as broad as the research literature about school improvement planning itself. Some research, like Fernandez’s (2011) study, focuses on the correlation between school improvement planning and student achievement. While Fernandez acknowledges that “there are almost no studies that empirically examine the effectiveness of SIPs” (p. 338), his study concludes that “there is a strong and consistent association between the quality of school planning and overall student performance in math and reading” (p. 338). But he also acknowledges that

the research design and method of this study was complicated and needed to “control for a variety of factors” (p. 338). He notes:

The review of the literature on this subject suggests that the conceptualization, operationalization, and eventual measurement of strategic planning and performance are far from easy. Collecting valid and reliable data on the quality of strategic plans and level of performance of an organization is a behemoth task wrought with many obstacles. (p. 345)

Conversely, other research suggests something different – “existing research on the effectiveness of formal planning is clear: Planning is essentially unrelated to organizational performance” (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000, p. 42). Dunaway et al. (2012) note that “little research has been done as to whether this ‘accepted practice’ actually improves schools” (p. 158) and that the “effectiveness of a school improvement plan has not been frequently assessed and the impact on effectiveness checks do not occur on a regular basis” (p. 160). While SIPs serve as “public statements of an organization’s intention to identify strengths and weaknesses, look critically at available resources, and build capacity in the process of continued growth and learning...the utility of these improvement plans for effective and meaningful school improvement remains questionable” (Anfara, Patterson, & Buehler, 2006, p. 293). Still others, like Bell (2004), explain that “the edifice of strategic planning in schools is based on a number of assumptions that can be seen as three sets of fallacies undermining its efficacy as a management technique for use in educational institutions” (p. 33). These fallacies will be discussed further in the literature review that follows.

In short, the research literature about the effectiveness of SIPs varies. While some argue they are beneficial (Doud, 1995; Dunaway et al., 2012), others question the efficacy of strategic planning in schools as a management technique (Bell, 2004). Still others claim that planning does not work (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000, p. 42), and schools can lose sight of student achievement as their primary goal (Fullan, 1993) especially when plans are often mandated to contain conflicting and contradictory demands from political environments (Wirt & Kirst, 1992) resulting in improvement efforts that become short lived, offer only ritualistic compliance (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988) and appear as additions to existing practices.

While the literature presented thus far raises questions about the effectiveness of SIPs, there is consensus among researchers for the need for more studies to take a closer look at school improvement planning. Fernandez (2011) states that “a longitudinal study is needed to look at patterns of SIP quality across schools and their impact on academic outcomes across time” (p. 361). Wikeley and Murillo (2005) suggest the need for future studies to explore the “importance of context, the role of internal and external change agents, and the complexity and interconnectedness of all factors and influences on effective school improvement” (p. 356).

Unlike Fernandez’s (2011) study, the intent of this research was not designed with positivist antecedents to determine the relationship between the quality of SIPs and student performance. Instead, it responds to the need for more research about the context of SIPs (Wikeley & Murillo, 2005) and uses interpretivist constructs and methods to explore what teachers and administrators do with them and the changes that result. This study recognized that SIPs and other improvement efforts are only parts of a larger, more

complex whole that affects student achievement. As Reezigt (2001) points out: “the importance of the context has rarely been acknowledged and analyzed in the school improvement literature” (p. 72).

With that in mind, the premise that “high quality planning should help organizations of all kinds achieve their goals” (Fernandez, 2011, p.339) juxtaposed with the contention that some researchers have been critical of the notion that formal planning can produce large improvements in schools and organizations (Bell, 2002; Mintzberg, 1994), has school improvement planning in New Brunswick after several years of use “achieved some deliberative end”? (Bretschneider et al., 2005, p.309).

A close look at student achievement in New Brunswick, if used as the only indicator to answer to this question, leaves it open to interpretation.

Student Achievement in New Brunswick: PISA, PCAP, and Provincial Assessments

New Brunswick has an accountability framework that continues to evolve. Recent changes include, but are not limited to, what is assessed, the marking criteria, which grades are assessed, and how data are used. What remains constant is New Brunswick’s involvement in both PISA and PCAP assessments.

New Brunswick’s PISA Performance

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a collaborative effort among member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). PISA is designed to provide indicators of the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students. It measures skills that are generally recognized as key outcomes of the educational process. The assessment focuses on young people’s ability to use their knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges. PISA permits

exploration of the ways that achievement varies across different social and economic groups, and the factors that influence achievement within and among countries.

The project began in 2000 and focuses on the capabilities of 15-year-olds as they near the end of compulsory education. It reports on mathematical, reading, and scientific literacy every three years, and selects one of those domains for more detailed study. In 2012 the focus was on mathematical literacy. In 2015 the emphasis was on science.

The PISA model is currently the “gold standard” for student assessment in Canada and both the national testing program, the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP), and the NB provincial assessment program adopt some elements of the PISA model.

In Canada, PISA is carried out through a partnership consisting of Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), Statistics Canada, and provincial departments of education. Each province is treated as an independent jurisdiction with their scores averaged to produce Canadian statistics. Approximately 21,000 15-year-olds from about 900 schools participate across the 10 provinces. Schools and students within schools are randomly selected. PISA is administered in schools during regular school hours. It is a two-hour paper-and-pencil test. Table 1 captures New Brunswick’s performance on PISA.

Table 1. New Brunswick's Historical Performance on PISA

YEAR	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015
Subject	Mathematics					
New Brunswick	Not Assessed	512	506	504	502	493
Canada	Assessed	532	527	527	518	516
Subject	Reading					
New Brunswick	501	503	497	499	497	505
Canada	534	528	527	524	523	527
Subject	Science					
New Brunswick	Not Assessed	Not Assessed	506	501	507	506
Canada	Assessed	Assessed	534	529	525	528

Canada's PISA math scores decreased 16 points from 2003 to 2015 while New Brunswick's math performance dropped 19 points. Over that time New Brunswick's math performance remained below the Canadian average. New Brunswick's performance in reading remained stable between 2000 and 2015 but was below the Canadian average. New Brunswick's science performance, like its math and reading performance, was relatively constant but also below the Canadian average.

New Brunswick's PCAP Results

The Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) was developed by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) and the provinces and territories throughout Canada. PCAP is administered every three years to approximately 32,000 Grade 8 students in over 1,500 schools throughout Canada. It is an assessment based on common curriculum outcomes across the nation in the areas of mathematics,

reading, and science. It is administered in both English and French. Table 2 captures New Brunswick’s performance on PCAP.

Table 2. New Brunswick’s performance on PCAP.

YEAR	2007	2010	2013
Subject	Mathematics		
New Brunswick	461	478	480
Canada	500	500	507
Subject	Reading		
New Brunswick	464	479	471
Canada	500	500	508
Subject	Science		
New Brunswick	465	487	469
Canada	500	500	500

The overall mean score of all New Brunswick students who completed the PCAP mathematics assessment was significantly lower than that of Canadian students in each of the years tested. Similarly, the overall mean score of New Brunswick students in both reading and science was significantly lower than that of Canadian students.

New Brunswick’s Provincial Assessment Results

New Brunswick’s provincial accountability framework includes several measures at various grade levels in the areas of literacy, numeracy, and French language proficiency. In Grade 2 near the end of each school year, reading comprehension is measured. The goal of the government of New Brunswick is for 90% of students to meet or exceed the appropriate level in reading. In 2016, 73.8% met or exceeded the appropriate achievement level in reading, a three percentage point decrease from 2015.

Over the last six years, there has been an overall 10 percentage point decrease in student achievement results in Grade 2 reading comprehension.

In 2014, fourth graders registered in the French Immersion program were assessed in reading. Results indicated that 68.4% met or exceeded the appropriate level in reading, an increase of 2.5% from the previous year but well below the expected goal of 90%. Similarly, only 22.2% of students in Grade 5 intensive French achieved or surpassed the expected oral proficiency level, a decrease of nine percentage points from the previous year with 51.6% reaching expected levels in writing. Results in mathematics in Grade 5 decreased again in 2014 with 59.4% of students meeting or exceeding the expected standard of 90%. Assessments in Grades 4 and 5 mathematics were discontinued in 2015.

A new assessment for Grade 6 students began in 2015 in mathematics, reading, and science. Results showed that only 20% of the students achieved at the appropriate level or above on the mathematics assessment, 54% of the students achieved at the appropriate level or above on the reading assessment, and 26% of the students achieved at the appropriate level or above on the science assessment. In the 2014 Grade 8 mathematics assessment, 57.6% met or exceeded expected levels (compared to the provincial target of 85%), a steady decrease over the previous four years. This assessment stopped in 2015.

In Grade 9, the English Language Proficiency Assessment in reading showed that 80.4% of students met or exceeded the appropriate achievement level in reading. In Grade 10, oral proficiency in French Second Language programs remained well below the expected standard. Similarly, in each of the various Grade 12 French Second

Language programs (core, late immersion, and early immersion) the number of students meeting or exceeding expected levels decreased and were well below expected standards.

New Brunswick's Achievement Results and School Improvement Planning

In summary, New Brunswick's PISA performance in math, reading, and science shows levels of achievement consistently below national performance. While consistency may be a desirable characteristic, being consistently below the Canadian average is not. This pattern has not changed from the mid-1980s when New Brunswick first participated in international assessments (International Assessment of Educational Progress and Third International Math and Science Study) and national testing programs (School Achievement Indicators Program and Pan-Canadian Assessment Program). New Brunswick's PCAP performance has consistently remained below the rest of Canada and overall scores rank close to last in the nation. New Brunswick's provincial assessment results indicate achievement below expected levels with successive decreases in the majority of the areas assessed in recent years. PISA, PCAP, and the provincial assessment results collectively indicate that student achievement is not increasing and, in many cases, decreased.

At a quick glance, it might be concluded that school improvement planning is not working in New Brunswick. However, as previously mentioned by Fernandez (2011), correlating SIPs with student achievement is a "behemoth task wrought with many obstacles" (p. 345). Not only are there questions about the validity and reliability of the assessments used to make assertions about the effectiveness of SIPs, but also considerations about the quality of SIPs, demographic and school characteristics among others are all factors that need to be accounted for when

drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of SIPs. This study is less concerned about the correlation between SIPs and student achievement. This research explores how teachers and administrators use them and the changes that result.

In New Brunswick, there is no research examining the relationship between school improvement planning and student achievement or on other forms of school improvement despite its long history using both the school improvement planning and school review processes as mechanisms to improve schools. The purpose of school improvement planning needs to be reviewed in this province if the hopes of provincial, district, and SIPs are ever to be realized.

The Purpose of the School Improvement Plan

Creemers and Kyriakides (2011) define school improvement as “a program for innovation focusing on change and problem solving in educational practice” (p. 344). Fernandez (2011) notes that most SIPs “establish specific and measurable objectives for progress and improvement, identify who is responsible for the implementation of strategies, and include strategies to promote professional development and parental engagement” (p. 356). Numerous other definitions are detailed in the literature review that explain what a SIP is and, while varying templates and models for the development of a SIP exist, Fernandez suggests that the purpose of the SIP is typically linked to either increasing the efficiency of the school, promoting organizational learning, or facilitating a strategic direction.

Increasing the efficiency of the school adopts the philosophy of “doing more with what you have” strategy. Proponents of this approach argue that to increase the quality of the educational setting, increasing the efficiency of program and service delivery is

essential (Wong, 2003). In short, instead of throwing more money at a problem, a suitable alternative is to free up resources to increase service and performance through efficiency and reduced costs. This purpose has become increasingly popular amongst politicians and policy makers alike, as fiscal constraints and the prevailing economic climate have resulted in budget cuts across several education systems.

Promoting organizational learning focuses on the school staff “learning to learn.” That is, schools are seen as organizations capable of responding to “internal and external stimuli” while learning new pedagogical approaches or management techniques. Hayes et al. (2004) describe the school as a learning community where staff learning corresponds to student learning as the theory and practice of new approaches lead to changes in regular teaching techniques.

Another purpose of the SIP is to facilitate strategic direction. This purpose captures what McNamara (2003) describes as a plan to help determine where an organization wants to go, what is needed to get there, and how to know if it got there. As such, SIPs are often referred to as strategic plans and “involve scanning the environment and conditions that the agency faces formulating goals and targets, developing an action to achieve the goals, and designing a method of monitoring and controlling implementation” (Robinson & Pearce, 1983, p. 198).

Against this background, the purposes of the SIP are arguably well intended and can be potentially meaningful to schools. However, knowing if the intended purposes of the SIP are ever realized causes me to question why school improvement planning is not equating to changes in results in student achievement as evidenced by PISA, PCAP, and

provincial assessment results. My experience with school improvement planning causes me to believe that it can result in making changes in schools.

Background, Interest, and Red Flags

My interest in school improvement planning comes from my work in public schools. I worked in various roles with numerous responsibilities. During that time, I observed that a subtle shift was happening with school improvement planning. I watched the process move from a linear, prescriptive, and principal-directed exercise to a teacher- and administrator-led activity that was interactive, emergent, and flexible in nature. This move was seen by many as a good thing, but, despite this change in practice, there remained several things about school improvement planning that troubled me. First, I was worried about school improvement planning in relation to school context. I felt that school improvement planning was contextually bound and influenced by demographics, culture and language, teacher and school capacity, socio-economic characteristics, and other factors that were emerging from the literature I was reading and thinking about. Despite these variables, the practice of school improvement planning remained the same. All schools completed the prescribed template and the factors listed above rarely influenced the creation of the SIP. Second, I was also worried about the design and content of SIPs. They generally looked all the same regardless of new research in the areas of assessment literacy, data-driven decision-making, and professional learning communities. Although “talked about,” integrating this research into the planning process was not practised or a requirement of educational policy. Provincial and district leadership seemed to pay little attention to the process of school improvement planning,

the design of the plan, or the quality of the content within it. I became concerned about how serious school improvement planning was being taken.

Doing Something Different with the School Improvement Plan

I have always believed that something different could be done with school improvement planning. As a former Director of Education, I believed in the value of school improvement planning, and at that time chose to do something different with them. I became inspired by the guiding questions contained in the professional learning community literature and decided to integrate them into a district-wide K-2 literacy improvement plan. These guiding questions asked educators to focus on what they wanted students to learn, how they knew if students were learning, what would be done if students did not learn, and what would they do if students already knew the content. My hunch was that by integrating these questions into the design of the improvement plans things would change. It just made sense to me. As the Director of Education, I had the positional influence to mandate all K-2 schools to design a literacy improvement plan that targeted improvements using these guiding questions in both instruction and intervention practices. The overall goal was to collectively raise individual school performance and by extension increase district achievement. Over a three-year period, my district's level of achievement on the Grade 2 provincial literacy assessment went from being one of the lowest in the province to the highest. I quickly realized the value of having these guiding questions as part of the design of the improvement plan. I watched teachers create realistic goals and agree upon strategies decided at the school level. Teachers took ownership for the implementation of plans. I

saw classroom and intervention practices change. I wanted to use the success of this example to change school improvement planning district-wide.

At the same time, I was getting more worried about the school improvement planning process as a single event - a one time, get it done, and send it off to central office activity. I observed that the use of various planning templates in the construction of the SIP remained the norm and compliance to filling out prescribed sections of the planning template a constant. While teachers generally complied with the expectations of participating in the writing of the SIP, few questioned the authenticity of what was included in the plan. Most teachers just seemed to want to get it done. Some said it was a “good thing” while others saw value in designing a well-articulated, informed plan. Still others believed that teachers and administrators alike did not have the time to question the SIP and were less concerned about how to make it better. School improvement planning remained an activity completed for the sake of completion.

During this time, I was also thinking about whose voices were included in the selection of the goals, strategies, and actions contained in the SIP and how these elements were negotiated. I thought about competing agendas and expectations that potentially influence the SIP. Given the fact that I served schools in a district with both English and French as languages of instruction I questioned whether the improvement goals and corresponding strategies contained in the SIP were the same for all students or if they were language dependent. I was wondering if improvement strategies geared at helping kids learn to read in English were the same for students learning to read in French. I suspected they were not, but observed no specific strategies targeting

language or children in different language streams. I also realized that improvement goals were mandated by the province and were to be aligned with curricular standards in the areas of literacy and numeracy. I often thought about what was done with the plans at school and beyond. Was feedback provided to teachers and administrators about the plan? Did teachers feel compelled to act on the plan to meet its goals? Most importantly, I wanted to know why a planning design I initiated to improve literacy achievement worked. I suspected teachers knew what to do all along. Someone needed to give them an OK to adopt instructional practices they knew or wanted to learn about, like guided reading, and support them along the way. I knew at the time I had little positional power to change school improvement practice on a larger scale, even as the Director of Education, given the unwillingness of my Superintendent to make changes because of the expectations of alignment and compliance to planning designs she was facing that were coming from the province. It appeared to me that school improvement planning was having limited effects on student achievement beyond the work I was doing at the K-2 level.

My Need to Look at School Improvement Planning

These observations are my lived experience based on personal and professional insights for over 20 years as a public school and district administrator, classroom teacher, and a Department of Education consultant responsible for school performance reviews. I have written planning documents designed to improve achievement at the school, district, and provincial levels, led professional development in the area of school improvement planning, coached others in writing plans, and reviewed numerous SIPs as part of a larger school and district review process.

I realized at some point that I wanted to take a closer look at school improvement planning in relation to the people involved, their experiences, and their understanding of the process itself. I discovered that a fundamental concern, rarely addressed in the current literature on school improvement planning, is the simple but profound realization that the key to successful school improvement planning is not the documentation of the plan itself but rather the strategic processes it undertakes to build improvement throughout the school. Central to these strategic processes are teachers. I was aware of some of the literature pointing out the daunting task of improving classroom performance (Elmore, 2005), but was surprised one day by an assertion uncovered during a book study I was doing with a group of principals that concluded that “existing research on the effectiveness of formal planning is clear: Planning is essentially unrelated to organizational performance” (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000, p. 42). I questioned the purpose of spending all this time on planning if the research indicates that organizational performance does not change. I suspected that SIPs remain at the documentation stage waiting for the strategies contained within them to be acted upon. I was interested in the extent to which meaningful, purposeful, strategic goals and actions that might be included in the SIP were enacted. Schmoker (1999) echoes this and comments on well-intended efforts to draw up vision and mission statements within SIPs that have enormous promise, but were included “in the near absence of any written or explicit intention to monitor, adjust, and thus increase student learning or student achievement” (p. 2). This contention led me back to the role of the teacher and administrator and the need to explore how they utilize the school improvement plan to make meaningful school

improvement. Were there strategic processes that teachers and administrators undertook to build improvement in their school?

Conceptual Framework of the Study

A constructivist qualitative grounded theory methodology was used in this study. The main objective of the study was to develop a substantive theory about how teachers and administrators use school improvement plans to make change in their schools.

Table 3 shows the design of the study using Crotty’s (1998) knowledge framework.

Table 3. Design of the study

ELEMENT	KEY FEATURE
Epistemology	Constructionism
Theoretical Perspective	Interpretivism Symbolic Interactionism
Methodology	Constructivist Grounded Theory
Methods, Techniques or Modes of Inquiry	1) Intensive Interviewing 2) Elicited Text 3) Extant Texts

These elements will be discussed further in chapter 3.

Significance of the Study

My interest in school improvement planning is informed by my previous experiences as an educator and administrator, and it is this background that motivated me to explore teachers’ and administrators’ experiences with school improvement planning. A grounded theory approach was used as I listened to their stories and made explicit their knowledge of the SIP, their involvement in the planning process, and if the actions and strategies within the SIP were enacted. I attempted to determine how principals and

teachers viewed the efficacy of school improvement planning by exploring with them what they saw as the relationship between improvement planning and changes resulting from it.

Even as the school improvement planning literature continues to grow, experts know relatively little about the process in relation to how teachers and administrators interact and engage in the school improvement planning process. At this point in time, the majority of school improvement planning research is primarily focused on the mechanistic structures of the plan itself. However, one study by Dunaway et al. (2012), discusses the perceptions of the purpose and value of the school improvement planning process. The authors look at why there is a lack of congruence between principals and teachers in matters relating to practices and perceptions of the SIP process, the role of school beliefs, values, vision, and mission, the involvement in the SIP development and implementation, as well as the impact of the SIP process. The authors cite this area as “deserving research beyond this study” (p. 165) and that “the study should be replicated in other systems to determine if universality of conclusions are valid” (p. 170). In addition, they note:

We see this as a starting point into multiple studies with the most important future research focusing, not only on perceptions of this accepted best practice, but on whether the school improvement planning process actually improves student learning and achievement to a significant degree. (p. 171)

The study by Dunaway and colleagues (2012) cites the need for more work to be done in this area and serves as a backdrop for this study. This research is needed, especially in New Brunswick, given its history of low student achievement by

comparison to the Canadian average. It places value on teachers' voices, as they are often referred to as the agents of change. Knowledge claims about the school improvement planning process often take the form of assumptions that are based on either what is expected or what has been previously tried. It is my hope that the understandings, experiences, and actions of the participants involved in this study will be used to generate theories about how teachers and administrators use school improvement plans to make change in schools. This study will hopefully cause leaders and policy makers to reflect on the purpose of school improvement planning and the importance of its strategic intent. This study can potentially influence current school improvement practices that guide teachers and administrators in their work to help students achieve learning outcomes.

Limitations of the Study

This study was designed using grounded theory methods to construct a substantive theory about how teachers utilize school improvement plans to make change in their schools. Undeniably there are limitations to any research. Creswell (2003) defines limitations as "a potential weakness in the design of the study" (p. 148). Marshall and Rossman (2006) note that there is no perfect design. As such, researchers recognize that there are limitations that affect the results of the study.

There were a number of limitations related to this study. First, the process to identify participants was a limitation. Thirteen recruitment letters were sent to principals of elementary schools via email. Four principals responded and I met with each of them at their schools. Three principals asked for a presentation to be made at a staff meeting. I

met with the fourth principal, but after hearing about the study she decided not to participate, as it was her first year at the school.

The sample size that resulted (N=9) might be considered a limitation. It represents only three principals and a few teachers within each school. In no way do their responses represent all of the teachers in the school. However, after multiple interviews with each participant, saturation occurred. Strauss and Corbin (1998) claim that saturation is reached when collecting data becomes counterproductive. They emphasize the importance of how often the concept emerges and how the properties look in different conditions rather than the number of individuals who exhibit a concept. Therefore, the generalizability of the data from this study is limited due to the nature of the study. The study itself was not designed to predict or account for large populations. Instead this grounded theory study attempted to explore and understand individuals and what they did with their SIPs. Further research could be designed and conducted particularly in both middle and high school contexts to strengthen the generalizability of this study.

Second, human bias was a limitation. I have extensive experience with school improvement planning and I may have interpreted participants' responses in ways that got scrambled with my previous work roles and as a researcher too. The interpretive nature of qualitative research may have the researcher introducing biases into the analysis and interpretations of findings. The potential to influence the development of my grounded theory could have occurred, even during subconscious categorizations of data.

A constructivist grounded theory methodology emphasizes what is being studied rather than the methods of studying it. The researcher's decisions, experience, and

interpretation must be made explicit. The researcher must be part of the process himself. The audience needs to be able to assess the extent of the researcher's interest, position, and underlying assumptions about what is being studied. Constructivist grounded theorists do not assume that data are simply waiting to be discovered by observing a reality external to their own. Neither does it assume that what the researcher observes and hears is neutral. Instead, an interpretive frame of reference is embraced. This includes acknowledging one's own life history and interest in the subject area as well as the research context, the relationship with the research participants, and the methods of generating and recording data. The researcher influences what is defined as data. Concepts and categories are interpretive rather than objective reportings. The constructivist position advocates methods that foster the integration of personal and individual participant experiences with the research context. The research process is interactive bringing past experiences and current interests together accepting them as problematic by recognizing how they might have been constructed. Constructivist grounded theory extends its traditional positivist antecedents by eliminating its neutral and passive stance beginning with gathering rich data as the first step.

Charmaz (2006) notes that "within constructivist grounded theory methodology a *reflexive stance* is explicitly recommended" (p.189); that is, when coding the data, be instinctive, automatic, and self-directed. This applied particularly during open coding. Being explicit about "informing how the researcher conducts his or her research, relates to the research participants, and represents them in reports" (p. 189) was also a requirement of this methodology. Acknowledging my familiarity with school improvement planning as a limitation was addressed through a research design that

involved a four-phase data analysis process, using three criteria of significance to make decisions about the data as well as four coding procedures advocated in the grounded theory methodology. Details about the research design of this study are discussed in both chapters 3 and 4. Any preconceived ideas about the data as a result of my experience with school improvement planning were filtered through these mechanisms as well as by triangulating the data using two additional data sources that did not include dialogue and resulted in a content analysis of both the SIPs and elicited responses from research participants. In addition, I practised memo writing to some extent as advocated in the grounded theory literature.

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations are used to “narrow the scope of a study” (Creswell, 2003, p. 148). Only elementary principals and teachers were invited to participate in the study. I chose to do this, as I am most familiar with this context especially as it relates to improvement strategies for literacy at the elementary level. As a novice researcher, this was important to me to ease my understanding of what teachers were sharing particularly as it related to the SIP and the changes made in their schools. This study was also bounded by the feasibility of time and the availability of teacher participants, as all of them elected to participate in the interview at their school and during the day. In addition, only elementary teachers and principals with experience working with SIPs were invited to participate. No data were collected from part-time teachers or any other stakeholders. The study was designed with my own background as a consideration, but I acknowledge that in doing so it may have also set limits on to whom or what my grounded theory can apply.

Summary

School improvement planning has taken place for many years and continues as a practice in schools today. In the province of New Brunswick, and likely in other educational jurisdictions too, there remains little evidence about how teachers use SIPs and if changes result. As teachers are primarily assigned the responsibility of strategies within SIPs, a better understanding of how teachers use SIPs to make change in their schools is needed.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. The first chapter served as an introduction to school improvement planning. It identified the purpose of the SIP and made explicit the research question, used achievement data to illustrate the current context in New Brunswick, provided the significance of the study and identified limitations and delimitations of the study. Chapter 2 provides a literature review to highlight research that defines school improvement, identifies assumptions within these definitions, comments on the efficacy of improvement planning and identifies gaps within the school improvement planning literature. Chapter 3 outlines and justifies the constructivist grounded theory methodology used to explore how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make changes in their schools. Chapter 4 begins with identifying the data collection methods used in this study. Given the voluminous amounts of data generated from interviews, the discussion of findings was separated into two chapters. Chapter 4 discusses findings from the interview data only, while the following chapter discusses findings from other methods and data sources used in the study. Chapter 4 also highlights the need to establish a data analysis framework and introduces

three criteria of significance used to help make decisions about the interview data. I discuss the data analysis framework used, the criterion of significance and the coding procedures for grounded theory methodology. The findings from the interview data are disclosed. Finally, after the third level of data analysis, I articulate my first attempt at theory development about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their schools. The theory is then tested in the last phase of data analysis using the antecedent work of a grounded theorist's quality of theory criteria. Chapter 5 provides the findings from the other methods and data sources used in the study. Findings from both the elicited responses and extant text analysis are shared and then the theory is refined based on these findings. Finally, Chapter 6 begins with a summary of the study and a discussion about the key finding and their implications. The study concludes with recommendations to be considered at various levels to move the practice of school improvement planning and its discourse forward.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The focus of this research was to explore how teachers and administrators use school improvement plans and the changes that result. This literature review begins by defining school improvement planning and includes a section that challenges these definitions by exposing assumptions within them. This is followed by literature about the effectiveness of school improvement planning. This chapter concludes with a brief summary highlighting existing knowledge and some of the current gaps in the school improvement planning research.

Defining School Improvement Planning

School improvement planning emerged as a process to assist schools in moving forward as early as 1978 (Edmonds, 1982). Part of the challenge in tracing the genesis of school improvement planning is in the fact that the term itself has been and continues to be used synonymously with strategic planning, long term planning, strategic thinking, action planning, and comprehensive planning. One frequently finds the same term used in a number of different ways, sometimes even in contradictory ways. As Fernandez (2011) notes, “although SIPs are rarely ever referred to as strategic plans, they contain many of the same characteristics” (p. 341). For the purpose of defining school improvement planning, this literature review includes numerous references to educational strategic planning.

The emergence of school improvement planning can be traced historically to the business and corporate world. In a discussion about the misconceptions of strategic planning and management, Cook (2004) identifies corporations, like General Electric, as among the first companies to use strategic planning to gain a competitive advantage in

the marketplace. Consolidated efforts to come up with the best strategy to move the company forward became the primary focus. The term *strategy* became mainstream in the business world, and was later manifested in the Total Quality Management movement of the late 1960s and gradually emerged “in education reflected in curriculum audits and even in something called policy management” (p. 74). In a fortuitous fashion, the language of improvement planning from the business world made its way into the educational milieu with the term *strategy* becoming a central component of the planning process. In the case of New Brunswick and most other jurisdictions, improvement planning eventually made its way into the *Education Act* (1997) and became the responsibility of the school principal.

In a comprehensive literature review by Hambright and Diamantes (2004), at least 15 definitions of educational strategic planning came into existence beginning in the mid-1980s. Cooper (1985) defines educational strategic planning as “the method by which an organization identifies relevant trends in its environment, analyzes their potential implications, and projects an integrated strategy to address these future events and their contingencies” (p. 1). In a similar fashion, Brown and Marshall’s (1987) definition suggests that educational strategic planning involves a process:

Educational strategic planning is a process that is designed to move an educational organization through the steps of understanding changes in the external environment, assessing the internal strengths and weaknesses of the organization, developing a vision of the desired future for the organization and some ways to achieve that mission, developing specific plans to get the organization where it is to where it wants to be, implementing these plans and

monitoring that implementation so that necessary changes or modifications can be made. (p. 3)

Pfeiffer, Goodstein, and Nolan (1989) state something similar:

Educational strategic planning is the process by which the guiding members of an organization envision the organization's future and develop the necessary procedures and operations to achieve that future. The vision of the future provides both direction and energy to move in that direction ... successful strategic planning is characterized by organizational self-examination, confronting difficult choices, and setting priorities. (p. 56)

Still others like Cawelti (1987) frame educational strategic planning as “a process deliberately designed to help leaders conceive of the kind of institution they would like to create to serve their students” (p. 7).

Meece and Adams (1991) include the use of several sources of information in their definition:

By using information about emerging trends and developments gleaned through a process of environmental scanning, the strategic planning process allows district planners to anticipate plausible alternative futures from which to derive appropriate strategic goals. These goals form both the district's collective “vision” for the future and a basis for ongoing operational planning and management. (p. 16)

Bryson's (1995) definition echoes the need for information gathering as well:

Strategic planning is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it

does it. To deliver the best results, strategic planning requires broad yet effective information gathering, development and exploration of strategic alternatives, and an emphasis on future implications of present decisions. (p. 5)

Cordell and Waters (1993) add the involvement of community to their definition and state that educational strategic planning is “a community-based and on-going process of imagining a preferred future and then developing the strategic and operational actions required to make that future a reality” (p. 27). Wincek and O’Malley (1997) assert that linkages to the community are vital to the process as well:

Educational strategic planning is a process that draws together the thinking of the community and gives stakeholders an opportunity to articulate their hopes for the future of the school, address issues that need attention and come to agreement on priorities. (p. 20)

Cook’s (1995) definition highlights the purpose of educational strategic planning and states that it is “the means by which an organization continually re-creates itself toward extraordinary purpose” (p. 41). Kaufman’s (1996) suggestion elucidates something similar in relation to a sense of purpose:

In its most powerful form strategic planning starts with society as the primary client and beneficiary and then rolls-down from that to identify what any organization commits to deliver. This approach assures the linkages among what organizations use, do, produce, and deliver. (p. 61)

Romney (1996) affirms a comparable purpose:

Educational strategic planning is a practical process for dealing with the ambiguities of the environment. Its purpose is to move the organization from

being a pawn to changing events to being a proactive participant, making decisions about and acting to create its own future. It requires organizational flexibility to adapt and revise as conditions change, and a willingness to move beyond obsolete paradigms. (p. 14)

More recently, Creemers (2002) suggests that school improvement planning is defined as “a program for innovation focusing on change and problem solving in educational practice” (p. 344). Cook (2004) succinctly suggests “all that is required is strategic organization, dealing with strategic issues, making strategic decisions and taking strategic actions” (p. 75). Bell (2002) is just as brief and simply states “the purpose of strategic planning is to scan the environment in which the school operates” (p. 343).

Flecknoe (2005) talks about improvement planning in relation to its results and examines improvement at the most detailed level by looking at changes in behaviour or academic progress of a few pupils as well as improvements in a subject area for whole classes. Flecknoe defines improvement as “any change reported by teachers and supported by evidence that they regard as a positive benefit to students” (p. 426).

In a more recent study by Fernandez (2011) that explored the relationship between the quality of SIPs and student performance, several definitions of strategic planning are cited. This study acknowledges how SIPs and strategic plans “contain many of the same characteristics” (p. 341) and uses definitions that contain both terms. McNamara’s (2003) definition notes “the purpose of strategic planning is to design a plan to help determine where an organization wants to go, what is needed to get there, and how will it know if it got there” (p. 341). Another definition is offered by Robinson and Pearce (2003):

Strategic planning involves scanning the environment and conditions that the agency faces, formulating goals and targets, developing an action to achieve the goals, and designing a method of monitoring and controlling implementation. (p. 341)

A final definition from the US Department of Education (2006, cited by Fernandez, 2011) states:

SIPs are frequently described in a similar fashion where staff analyze problems, identify underlying causes, establish measurable goals, incorporate strategies and adopt policies that directly address the problems, and monitor implementation. (p. 341)

Exposing Assumptions within Definitions

These definitions represent an overview of improvement planning by various authors over the last 30 years. Most contain an intended purpose with an emphasis on promoting change in schools and the need to plan for the future. Several acknowledge the importance of gathering information by assessing the schools' strengths and weaknesses and offering an invitation for input from various stakeholders to assist in the facilitation of the planning process. Others point to what the organization commits to deliver to help the organization get from where it is to where it wants to be. However, these definitions represent the epitome of the school improvement planning process, and researchers like Bell (2004) point out several assumptions within these definitions that pose realistic challenges for educators. These include assumptions about planning and school leadership, school context, school effectiveness, autonomy, and perfecting the educational system.

Research by Fernandez (2011) acknowledges Bell's contribution, noting that he "provided a well-articulated critique of the assumptions behind SIPs" (p. 343).

Assumptions about Planning and School Leadership

Bell (2004) explains that "the edifice of strategic planning in schools is based on a number of assumptions that can be seen as three sets of fallacies undermining its efficacy as a management technique for use in educational institutions" (p. 33). He begins by introducing the first fallacy - the nature of school leadership. The leadership fallacy begins with the notion of the principal "as the locus of management expertise and the individual who carries the burden of responsibility for planning" (p. 34). Bell suggests "the leadership role...is located within a hierarchical view of the school in which the head teacher (principal) is the solitary, heroic and accountable leader who personifies and exemplifies the totality of leadership skills and managerial competencies" (p. 34). He continues by calling attention to this form of leadership that is based on "control, efficiency, performance of staff and measurable pupil outcomes" (p. 34). He points out, "Such forms of leadership and management as an appropriate way to conduct the planning process does not recognise the importance of dispersed leadership or the part played by individual teachers in implementing strategies for improvement" (p. 34). Moreover, he suggests that this technical-rationalist approach to education does not recognize other benefits to education other than economic utility. Specifically, he draws attention to the fact that "matters related to the school as a social and moral organisation, living with others in a diverse community and wider issues of social justice are largely ignored in the quest for a narrowly defined form of improvement" (p. 34).

Assumptions about Planning and School Context

Bell's (2004) second fallacy about improvement planning is known as the predictive fallacy. Here he underscores that "strategic planning is predicated on being able to predict the future of the school's environment" (p. 34). In short, he points out that the purpose of strategic planning is to know the environment of the school, forecast the future and deploy resources accordingly in order to meet and respond to the anticipated situation. "It requires the ability to plan effectively and to exercise sufficient control or influence over the organisation and its environment to ensure that planned outcomes can be achieved by the deployment and redeployment of available resources" (p. 34). Not only do principals need to have the ability to assess and evaluate everyday school conditions, but somehow they must also be able to foreshadow possible future states. "Such planning presupposes that head teachers have the capacity to understand, predict, control the environment and not be controlled by it" (p. 34). He asserts that "to achieve this it must be assumed that schools can be managed so as to respond in a rational way to environmental factors and that organisationally acceptable means and desired ends can be rationally linked" (p. 34).

Bell's (2004) claim about predicting the school environment and proactively responding assumes that principals have both human and financial resources to intervene. What is just as problematic is that planning in this context assumes that it is timely, responsive, "orderly and sequential and that schools can operate in such a way as to avoid the unintended consequences of change while realising strategic objectives" (p. 34). Hodgkinson (2001), in an analysis of educational leadership over a 60-year period, alluded to the current rate of change using the Industrial Revolution as a reference point

while discussing infrastructural change. He states that “the present curve of change (and its learning curve) is, by comparison, exponential. All such changes affect the social superstructure or culture because they change the context” (p. 300). Reezigt (2001) echoes the importance of the context of schools in relation to school improvement planning but acknowledges that “the context has rarely been acknowledged and analyzed” (p. 72) in the school improvement literature.

Assumptions about Planning and School Effectiveness

Bell (2004) points out one remaining fallacy derived from the research on school effectiveness. He contends that the

problem is that the discourse of effective schooling and school improvement is largely based on an extremely narrow set of criteria against which to identify the effect of schools on pupil performance and tends to reduce learning to limited, discrete, assessable and comparable segments of academic knowledge. (p. 34)

Bell claims that planning based on this type of reductionism “suffers from an impoverished, mechanistic and narrow view of what counts as educational achievement; it ignores the impact of context and disregards the effects of differential funding, school selection policies and, above all, social and economic advantage” (p. 35).

School effectiveness research, according to Bell (2004), is seriously flawed. He insists that “the school effectiveness discourse labels entire schools as good or bad after measuring them against conformity to disconnected criteria” (p. 35). In a similar fashion, various attempts to rank schools, such as those by the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies (AIMS) and the Fraser Institute have been criticized on the same grounds. Bell maintains the following assertion:

This is an inappropriate level of analysis...because the dominant organisational entity within schools is the classroom and the main point of reference is the age stage or the subject. This aspect of the school effectiveness discourse fails to recognise that it is not necessarily the difference between schools that affects achievement most significantly, but differences within them. (p. 35)

He continues by taking issue with the school effectiveness discourse, pointing out that it lacks any clear conceptual rationale linking characteristics that commonly describe an effective school with a dynamic model of school leadership and management in such a way that it might be possible to explain the relationships between those characteristics and improved pupil performance. (p. 35)

Ouston's (1998, cited by Bell, 2004) work reinforces his point: "The precise nature of the relationship between an effective principal, the classroom performance of an individual teacher and the learning of a particular child is largely ignored in the school effectiveness literature" (p. 35). As such, planning then is based on something that not only assumes that the school context is constant in relation to the staff, students and administration of a school but also relative to a teaching and learning process that is consistent, informed, limited and measurable. As Bell points out, "its outcomes, therefore, are merely the disjointed acquisition of disconnected elements of knowledge and the limited acquisition of context specific competencies" (p. 35).

Against this background, Bell (2004) is concerned that strategic planning "is deeply flawed as it is based on inappropriate assumptions about the nature and purpose of education and is founded on an ill-conceived model of schools as organisations and how

schools are managed” (p. 35). Most alarming, strategic planning as a management technique for staff in schools neglects to recognize and appreciate qualified, motivated teachers and their creativity and thinking. This shortcoming fails to capture the talent of the organization and in no way can account for the rate and impact of technological, social and political changes that perpetually influence school environments.

Assumptions about Planning and Autonomy

In addition to Bell’s (2004) critique of the assumptions behind SIPs, Cook (2004) is another researcher that discusses ownership, autonomy, and “locus of control” of school improvement planning, and identifies that “the first requirement of a strategic organization is that it be autonomous; that is, self-governing” (p. 74). Acknowledging that most school boards have adopted a corporate model of organizational structure that presupposes autonomy, he recognizes that most do not exercise it as a strategy. He claims, “The lack of autonomy is the reason schools, departments, and even professional learning communities in traditional organizations cannot engage in strategic planning” (p. 74). If the locus of control remains outside the organization, “then the highest aspiration of any planning will be the adaptation for survival” (p. 74). Therefore, he claims the “strategic intent” of actions becomes compromised and actions throughout the system are not strategic, resulting in a plan limited to a collection of disconnected initiatives. “Planning can only be considered strategic only if it sees a new reality and does whatever it can to push the existing system toward that reality” (p. 75).

Assumptions about Planning and Perfecting the Educational System

Again, Cook (2004) points to another assumption about planning. He suggests that planning for the purpose of perfecting the education system is a fatal flaw. He

questions if the education system “can be confined to process, uniformity, and precision and, with the proper testing and calibration, can be perpetuated long after any apparent usefulness” (p. 75).

Such is the case in the province of New Brunswick with the current chase to reach achievement standards, especially in the areas of literacy and numeracy. While some might see standards as important in the sense of providing an achievement level to attain, others question what information was used to establish the standards. Still others might question if we collectively take responsibility and ownership of them. These apparent arbitrary numbers in the form of improvement objectives or SMART goals (Conzemius & O’Neill, 2002) contained in SIPs in no way have been derived from previous, normed performance, but rather imported from research, other educational contexts, or principal best guesses. At best, current standards foster the quest for and incubation of best practices to prove that they can be reached. At worst, standards reinforce that they cannot be reached. They underscore the unsuccessful attempts to replicate best practice and result in disengagement and cynicism about what teaching and learning really mean.

These assumptions point to the layers within the definitions that educators might confront as they engage in the school improvement planning process. Awareness of these assumptions is critical to this research not just to acknowledge the challenges schools face in trying to make improvements, given the fact that schools are complex organizations, but also to help us understand that changes that might result from teachers and administrators engaging in the school improvement planning process can go beyond just increases in student achievement. This study will unveil other forms of improvement that happen as a result of teachers and administrators using SIPs, particularly those

associated with the context of the school. It seems clear that the literature is sparse about the effectiveness of SIPs in relation to any changes associated with the context of the school. Instead, there is a plethora of research about school improvement and strategic plans in relation to performance, the majority of which points to plans not working.

The Effectiveness of Improvement Planning

This study explored how teachers and administrators utilize SIPs to make change in their schools. In the previous chapter, literature about the effectiveness of improvement planning, the design of such studies, along with an overview of student achievement results in New Brunswick was introduced. Against that background, the effectiveness of school improvement planning was left open to interpretation. A closer look at the literature about the effectiveness of school improvement planning is provided next.

A review of the literature shows several studies that comment on the effectiveness of school improvement planning. A few studies highlight the benefits of school improvement planning, but the majority of the research completed in this area points to its negative effects. Still there are other studies that identify the challenge of determining if school improvement planning is working. One such study by Levin and Wiens (2003) suggests that successful school improvement is a "long-term project that can only be judged retrospectively" (p. 663). In a similar vein, Flecknoe (2005) comments on studying teacher behaviour during improvement and acknowledges that it is "difficult to know whether a school is improving" (p. 426). He claims that recent improvement can be detected, but not current improvement. Flecknoe also states that "recent improvement is no guarantee that current improvement is taking place" (p. 426) and cannot be sustained for long periods of time. He notes that concurrent studies of a school in the process of

improvement are limited. He concludes that the closest research can get to observing teachers in the process of improvement is to “record their behavior in reflective writing during the process of improvement and discuss this process with colleagues so they can form mutual ideas about what works” (p. 426).

In addition to these studies, Fernandez (2011) also acknowledges “how difficult it may be to flesh out the relationship between planning and performance” (p. 344). He attributes this challenge to an over reliance on the use of prior studies to prove if planning works and the “methodological and research design issues” (p. 344) of some of these studies. He points out “surveying the leadership within the organizations being studied” (p. 344) as one design flaw that sometimes results in “the quality of the planning process and the performance outcomes that are based on internal agency leaders’ perceptions and beliefs rather than on external objective assessment” (p. 344). He claims:

This takes the measurement and assessment of both the quality of the planning process and the actual performance of the organization out of the hands of the researcher and into the hands of someone in the organization – perhaps the CEO or administrative assistant. (p. 344)

In addition to this design flaw, Fernandez (2011) echoes previous studies that found issues with research methods that relied on “a small or modest sample size that produce insufficient statistical power to explore the complex relationship between planning and performance” (p. 344), “thus threatening the generalizability of the study” (p. 345). Fernandez (2011) makes a similar caution about studies that use a qualitative methodology. Referring to studies by Doud (1995), Levine and Leibert (1987), Mintrop and MacLellan (2002), and Schutz (1980), Fernandez (2011) contends:

The limited number of published studies that specifically address the effects of SIPs frequently use a qualitative methodology to better understand school improvement planning. Although these studies are highly rigorous examinations of the school improvement planning process and have been critical in identified strengths and weaknesses in the planning process, these studies cannot be generalized to larger populations and are limited in their ability to observe patterns across a large number of schools. (p. 345)

Aside from the challenges of methodological and research design issues of studies that focus on determining if school improvement planning works, there are a few studies that purport its benefits (Brown & Marshall, 1987; Bryson & Alston, 1996; Cawelti, 1987). However, Fernandez (2011) notes that studies that show evidence of school improvement planning and improvements directly linked to student achievement are limited. He states, “A search for the published literature on the impact of planning on performance produces few results” (p. 343). He continues by citing a few studies (Armstrong, 1982; Miller & Cardinal, 1994) that explore the effectiveness of planning and points out that “many conclude good planning should improve performance, however, the evidence does not always support such a hypothesis” (p. 343). Nonetheless, in a review of underperforming schools, Cawelti (2003) identifies other forms of improvements can take place as a result of the school improvement plan. These include the establishment of an accountability program to drive change efforts, a shift in resources to support improvement efforts, research data used to inform decisions, and increased time for teacher collaboration.

Conversely, the literature contains several studies providing details about the negative elements linked to conducting strategic planning processes in an educational organization (Brown, 1996; Bryson, 1995; Bryson & Alston, 1996; Cook, 1995; Cunningham, 1993; Rieger, 1994; Romney, 1996). One study by Anfara et al. (2006) suggests that “the literature is replete with accounts of school improvement failures” (p. 278). Several factors contribute to these catastrophes, including conflicting and often contradictory demands from political environments (Wirt & Kirst, 1992), resulting in schools losing sight of student achievement as their primary goal (Fullan, 1993). In addition, schools react to improvement efforts as being short lived and offer ritualistic compliance (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988); reforms then appear as add-ons to existing practices. Research by Levine and Leibert (1987) suggests that “planning requirements often have the unintended effect of overloading teachers and administrators” (p. 398). Claims by Levine and Leibert (1987) and Creemers (2002), suggest that SIPs are created as reactions to imposed efforts, such as those from a political context, and are often unrealistically comprehensive rather than being focused and strategic. While there might be the appearance of changes in school structures, transformation in school culture usually is non-existent and “the danger of short-lived and superficial change is real” (Creemers, 2002, p. 347). In Fernandez’s (2011) review of the literature, he cites several studies that found “strategic plans can waste valuable time and there is little empirical evidence that such strategies work” (p. 343) and “that agencies can become bogged down in planning and incapable of doing anything” (p. 343). Fernandez goes on to state that “in fact some studies (Bryson & Roering, 1987; Halachmi, 1986; Mintzberg, 1994) have suggested that

formal planning can lead to inflexible and myopic practices” (p. 343). He notes, moreover: “This may be especially true for mandatory planning imposed on schools. Everyone in a professional learning community being in agreement on a strategic plan, by itself, is not necessarily a good thing” (p. 343). McLaughlin (1993) notes something similar: “Consensus might simply be a reflection of ‘shared delusions’ and unified and collective agreements and entrenched routines may simply produce ‘rigidity’ that interferes with serious reflection and reform” (p. 95).

Hambright and Diamantes (2004) state that “strategic planning models tend to be weak in provisions for evaluating the implementation of plans” (p. 4). Brown (1996) acknowledges a further shortcoming in providing adequate resources for implementation as well as “the level of commitment to strategic planning and its subsequent action plan implementation” (p. 236). Hambright and Diamantes reinforce this point thus: “if there is no internal commitment to the plan, and no intent to implement it, strategic planning is a waste of time and energy” (p. 17). Bryson and Alston (1996) conclude that “if the organization lacks the commitment of key decision makers, to carry through an effective strategic planning process and produce a good plan, the effort should not be undertaken” (p. 6). Bryson (1995) maintains that “engaging in strategic planning when effective implementation will not follow is the organizational equivalent of the average New Year’s resolution” (p. 9). In a similar fashion, Fernandez (2011) asserts “that many organizations attempt to engage in formal planning but not many are successful in producing effective plans or there may be a disconnect between planning and the actual execution of a plan” (p. 343).

Hambright and Diamantes (2004), in their review of articles and books on strategic planning, state that “the literature is replete with educational planning models” (p. 237); however, they caution that the “ascribed advantages to these models and their subsequent processes are suspect due to limited accounts of actual field testing or practice” (p. 237). Most compelling, they draw attention to the need for future studies to examine the correlation of strategic planning with increased student achievement, an observation made in previous works dating back to 1989. Moreover, Hambright and Diamantes highlight previous recommendations made by Brown (1996), and Conley (1994) who have called for longitudinal studies of strategic planning effects. In addition, Wikeley and Murillo (2005) note the need to examine the “importance of context, the role of internal and external change agents, and the complexity and interconnectedness of all factors and influences on effective school improvement” (p. 356).

One study by Dunaway et al. (2012) examined the perceptions of the role of internal change agents in the school improvement planning process. This study focused on how teachers and administrators perceive the purpose and value of an SIP and the planning process. Its findings identified several incongruences between principal and teacher perceptions. The first involves the practices and perceptions of the SIP process. While there was agreement that the goals of the SIP were discussed on a regular basis, there was a large discrepancy between principals and teachers regarding frequent monitoring of student achievement data in relation to the goals of the SIP. A significant number of teachers felt that this did not happen in contrast to the perceptions of principals. Principals and teachers were split in their views about the role of beliefs, values, vision, and mission in the creation of the SIP. At least one-quarter of all

teachers surveyed perceived that “beliefs and values of the school had little impact on the SIP or were a waste of time” (p. 163). Perceptions about principal, teacher, and parental involvement in the development and implementation of the SIP were mixed as well. Twenty percent of teachers responded that the principal developed the plan with limited input and that parents had limited or no involvement. “Almost one-half of teachers reported that input was limited to reviewing or voting on the SIP” (p. 163). The majority of principal responses viewed the SIP process as being valuable and resulted in significant improvement whereas only half of the teachers surveyed agreed with this perception.

A similar study by Anfara et al. (2006) examined the content of SIPs along with measuring “teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions and beliefs regarding the development and usage of school improvement plans and the importance of these plans in the day-to-day processes of operating and improving an educational organization” (p. 283). The authors concluded that, while students do not know the focus of the SIP, teachers and administrators were aware that existing school data were used in the development of the SIP. Another finding suggested that administrators consistently scored each survey item higher than did the teachers. The greatest difference in teacher and administrator scores dealt with the “involvement on the school improvement process, the use of research-based strategies in the improvement plan, school-based professional development focused on the targeted areas needing improvement and familiarity with the model for school improvement planning” (p. 291). The authors also reported that the most positive result of the process was collaborating with colleagues, while the most

negative part of the process was time involved and paperwork required. In addition, the authors noted that while school improvement planning serves as

public statements of an organization's intention to identify strengths and weaknesses, look critically at available resources, and build capacity in the process of continued growth and learning...the utility of these improvement plans for effective and meaningful school improvement remains questionable. (p. 293)

Moreover, the authors concluded that, while the plans' outcome goals focused on raising student achievement, there was "no significant attention paid to factors that correlate with improved student academic performance, teacher sense of efficacy, or quality of leadership" (p. 294) as well as an oversight to evaluate teaching strategies, curriculum, or assessment.

Summary

There is much to consider from the literature defining school improvement planning, the underlying assumptions embedded within these definitions, and the findings from studies examining the effectiveness of school improvement planning. Efforts to equate the utilization of SIPs to changes in schools appear limited. This review of the literature reveals numerous definitions that make reference to a process for teachers to self-examine school strengths and weaknesses, develop a vision of where they want to go, design and implement a plan to move in a new direction, set priorities, and monitor the implementation of various improvement actions. However, within these definitions there are assumptions that present challenges for those responsible for the implementation of the SIP. These challenges include deciding how to deal with unanticipated and uncontrollable external forces that often get in the way of improvement

efforts, varying leadership capacities that were either shared or not, an uncertain school context rife, fluctuating funding for resources and teacher allotments, and shifting political agendas. Being aware of these assumptions can help us understand the challenges of making changes in schools but also point out that the changes resulting from SIPs are not only isolated to changes in student achievement. Such assumptions need to be explored further in relation to how teachers use SIPs to make change as a means to validate them and ultimately as a way to comment on the effectiveness of improvement planning.

This literature review was significant not only to point out that more work in this area was needed but also to identify a few fundamental gaps in the research. The first shortcoming is to point out the over-reliance of previous studies that explored the relationship between SIPs and student performance that depended on methodology and research design with positivist constructs. This means that just because the existing literature, like Fernandez's (2011) study that used Armstrong's (1982, cited by Fernandez, 2011) claim that few studies "found a statistically significant relationship between formal planning and improved performance" (p. 343), does not mean school improvement planning does not work. Studies that attempt to correlate school improvement planning and student performance that use a positivist research design can make this claim from this vantage point. However, it does not mean there are no other perspectives or research designs that find something different and produce findings that legitimize the value that SIPs have on making positive changes in schools. Studies that have a quantitative focus and seek only to show the relationship between the school improvement plan and student performance should be complemented by studies like this

one that explores what teachers and administrators do with SIPs and the changes that result.

A second reason that this literature review is important to this study is to reinforce that schools are complex organizations. Several references to Bell's (2004) critique of the assumptions behind SIPs and Cook's (2004) research reaffirm this. It needs to be understood that the contexts of schools are not constant and other forms of change can result from school improvement planning. The purpose of this study is to explore how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their schools. As such, the contribution of this study goes beyond the abundance of literature that focuses on the relationship of school improvement planning and student performance. Instead, it focused on the context of school improvement planning and the changes that resulted.

As such, a final reason that this study is important is to offset the imbalance of research that currently relies heavily on demonstrating the relationship between SIPs and student achievement. A study such as this one seems warranted not only to go beyond the current research that relies heavily on positivist research approaches, but to make a contribution to the school improvement planning literature by using an interpretivist methodology that captures the voices of teachers and administrators and what they say about how they use school improvement plans to make change in their schools.

Chapter 3: Methodology

My interest in school improvement planning comes from my experiences as a former teacher, school administrator, and Director of Education. My responsibility in each of these capacities was to plan and deliver the best programs and services for the students and teachers I served. I continue to believe that improvement plans at all levels are created with the best intentions of trying to make something better. However the majority of studies that examine the effectiveness of school improvement planning focus primarily on the relationship between the plan itself and student performance and reveal that improvement in student outcomes or other targeted areas are seldom realized. A glaring gap in the school improvement literature is the near absence of studies that examine the effects of school improvements plans in relation to the context of the school. I wanted to conduct a study that would develop a substantive theory about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their schools so that others interested in this topic could vicariously experience the relational and discursive nature of this professed best practice (Dunaway et al., 2012). Through this discourse I wanted to demonstrate that the generation of a substantive theory about this phenomenon itself can be seen as an effect of SIPs that is alternative to mainstream studies.

A constructivist grounded theory methodology was used to address the research question of this study: *How do teachers utilize school improvement plans to make change in their schools?* Secondary objectives included exploring and explaining: (a) what happens to these plans after they are written, (b) if the strategies within them were implemented, and (c) if efforts to improve schools were realized, what form of school improvement took place.

Why a Qualitative Approach Was Used

To study how teachers use SIPs to make change in their schools, a qualitative approach was used. Unlike quantitative research approaches that pursue explanations and interpretations using numbers and statistics, qualitative inquiry searches for understandings informed by words and representations, feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are tied to processes rather than outcomes or products (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative studies seek to capture the descriptive experiences and feelings of the participants to examine multidimensional system structures and the effects these naturally occurring social structures have on participants (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Qualitative research is not worried about the collection of empirical data about physical events, but rather, it is concerned about bringing to light multidimensional social structures as seen through the eyes of the participants within these structures (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Qualitative procedures seek to understand the interaction of the participants within these structures and go beyond the what, where, and when foci of quantitative research to explore the how and why (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The review of the literature found only a few studies that provided a limited perspective of teachers' understandings of SIPs and no studies that used a grounded theory methodology to explore this research area.

As such, this study used a methodology informed by a theoretical framework that has "process" at its core and one that can be used to examine the complexity of "social psychological processes" (Charmaz, 2002, p. 675). This study used grounded theory as a research methodology to better understand how teachers and administrators use the SIP

and the changes that resulted. By using their experiences, I became privy to the processes at work in relation to school improvement planning and the changes that resulted.

The Evolution of Grounded Theory

The origin of grounded theory dates back to 1967 with the seminal work of Barney Glaser and Anslem Strauss entitled *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Informed by their observations in hospital settings of the interactions between terminally ill patients and professionals caring for them, their work offered techniques for the generation of theory from qualitative data. Exploring analytic ideas using conversation and a comprehensive review of their field notes, Glaser and Strauss developed systematic methodological strategies that social scientists could use to study various topics. Similar to other methodologies, grounded theory advocates for data collection methods that include, but are not limited to, observation, interviews, and document analysis. The key difference first articulated by Glaser and Strauss “advocated developing theories from research grounded in data rather than deducing testable hypotheses from existing theories” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 4). As Allen (2010) notes, Glaser and Strauss’s purpose was to “inspire readers to pursue their own theory generation” (p. 1607).

At the outset of this study, I wanted to generate a theory about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their schools. With this in mind, the interpretive research paradigm made the most sense to me to answer the research question posed in this study. As Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2002) and Nasser (2001) point out, the inductive nature of the interpretive paradigm can lend insight into studies with no or few existing theories. I had no interest in using a positivist research paradigm that sought to find out more about causal relationships among different variables. Instead,

I wanted to learn about how teachers and administrators use SIPs in their schools and what changes resulted. In addition, according to Charmaz (2006), a positivist method assumes

an unbiased and passive observer who collected facts but did not participate in creating them, the separation of facts from values, the existence of an external world separate from scientific observers and their methods, and the accumulation of generalizable knowledge about this world. (p. 5)

Unlike a positivist research approach whereby the researcher takes a neutral role remaining separate from the participants (if that is possible), a grounded theory approach acknowledges that these observations are often problematic with multiple views, layers, and connections that are not often seen or exposed. For this reason a grounded theory methodology to explore how teachers and administrators use SIPs made sense to me.

My journey with grounded theory methodology began as a result of being exposed to it during numerous discussions about the “ologies” in my doctoral seminar classes. Struggling to make sense of it all, I later discovered that these “ologies” simply mean “what we make to be true (epistemology), what we take to be real (ontology), and what we take to be of value (axiology)” (Piantanida, Tananis, & Grubs, 2004, p. 326). This corresponds to what Van Manen (1977) said in an earlier work: “Underlying every orientation is a definite epistemology, axiology and ontology, i.e., a person’s orientation is composed of what he believes to be true, to be valuable, and to be real” (p. 211). I wanted my research “to be true, to be valuable, and to be real” (Van Manen, 1977, p. 211). Concomitant to these “ologies” were various methodologies that could be used with several epistemological perspectives. My doctoral seminar classes exposed me to

Crotty's (1998) knowledge framework. This was suggested to us as a way to help align epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods. Aspiring to contribute something meaningful to the school improvement planning literature and wanting to learn more about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their schools, I was drawn to "the idea that it was possible to theorize from qualitative data grounded in lived experience" (Piantanida et al., 2004, p. 328). Immersing myself into the literature on grounded theory methodology I became more disillusioned than inspired. My cognitive dissonance originated from my interpretation of the books and articles I was reading about grounded theory methodology, not to mention the different paths the original authors (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) took in later works. Acknowledging the tremendous contribution by the original authors of grounded theory, Piantanida et al. (2004) state that

Glaser (1978, 1992, 1994, 1998) and Strauss in collaboration with Corbin (1994, 1997, 1998) have contributed significantly to this discourse. Interestingly, as each worked to clarify his conception of grounded theory, an apparent schism opened between the two. (p. 329)

What resulted is a number of studies "that attempt to clarify specific procedures, espousing either a more 'Glaserian' or 'Straussian' approach to grounded theory" (Piantanida et al., 2004, p. 329).

As part of one of my comprehensive exams, I was asked to review several grounded theory studies. This process shed some light on the methods used and if a substantive theory was generated. The majority of the studies I reviewed offered little clarity on how the data were analyzed or the procedures used. My review showed that

although these articles professed to be grounded theory studies the majority of them did not generate a theory. Piantanida et al. (2004) see this as a common occurrence and cite numerous articles

aimed at audiences that would be more interested in the substance of the theory than in the research procedures. While these offer interesting examples of how a grounded theory might be portrayed they often provide only minimal insight into the process by which the theory was generated. (p. 328)

My search to understand how one does grounded theory was initially comforted by the flexibility the methodology offered. Specifically, Glaser and Strauss's (1967, cited by Piantanida et al., 2004) wrote:

Our principal aim is to stimulate other theories to codify and publish their own methods for generating theory...In our own attempt to discuss methods and processes for discovering grounded theory, we shall, for the most part, keep the discussion open-minded, to stimulate rather than freeze thinking about the topic. (p. 8)

Strauss and Corbin (1998) reaffirm this principle of flexibility:

This is not a recipe book to be applied to research in a step-by-step fashion. Our intent is to provide a set of useful tools for analyzing qualitative data. We hope that through our examples, readers will come to realize the fluid and flexible approach to data analysis provided by this method. (p. xi)

While I was attracted to using a methodology that was flexible, I remained lost as to how to use it to analyze my data and seemed plagued by its elusiveness until I

discovered Charmaz's (2002) work and how she spelled out for me the essence of grounded theory:

The rigor of grounded theory approaches offers qualitative researchers a set of clear guidelines from which to build explanatory frameworks that specify relationships among concepts. Grounded theory methods do not detail data collection techniques; they move each step of the analytic process toward the development, refinement, and interrelation of concepts. The strategies of grounded theory include (a) simultaneous collection and analysis of data, (b) a two-step data coding process, (c) comparative methods, (d) memo writing aimed at the construction of conceptual analyses, (e) sampling to refine the researcher's emerging theoretical ideas, and (f) integration of the theoretical framework.

(p. 510)

These strategies, although nebulous at first, served as a springboard for me to use and a body of research (Charmaz, 2002) that I felt would shed some light on the research question this study was attempting to address. For this reason, I became attracted to and immersed in Charmaz's research about a constructivist approach to grounded theory.

Grounded Theory as a Constructivist Approach

Echoing the work of Glaser (1992) and Strauss and Corbin (1998), but in a very different way, Charmaz (2006) offers a constructivist approach to grounded theory.

Entrenched in interpretivism, constructivist grounded theory is congruent with interpretive methods of research. It positions our knowledge of reality as a social construction by the participants who make it up and recognizes that the acquisition of "value-free" data is impossible. Data collected using a constructivist grounded theory

approach acknowledge the preconceptions of the researchers and their role in their collection and analysis. As Hirschkorn (2008) notes: “Constructivist designs are more focused on the subjective meanings given by the participants. They are much more narrative with a focus on the feelings, experiences, meanings, and beliefs of the participants as well (to a lesser degree) the researcher” (p. 3). A constructivist grounded theory design includes “placing priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). I believe the research question in this study lends itself to this and was less concerned about objectivity from the perspective of the world being an external reality and the observer’s role as being neutral. Instead, this approach valued the relations between the “viewer and the viewed” and how the researcher represented the research participant. A constructivist study can investigate “*how-* and sometimes *why-* participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). Replicating the experience of participants is not grounded theory. This study went beyond commenting on how participants saw themselves in a particular situation to offering an interpretation of the experiences of teachers and administrators and their use of SIPs to make changes in their schools. A constructivist approach “acknowledges that the resulting theory is an interpretation. The theory depends on the researcher’s view. It does not and cannot stand outside of it” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). The assumption is that both data and analyses are social constructions.

Grounded Theory and Epistemology

Given the flexible nature of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) and the interactive expectations used when working with the data, associated epistemological frameworks include pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, social constructivism, and postmodernism. Charmaz (2006) notes that “constructivist grounded theory lies squarely in the interpretive tradition” (p. 130). As such, pragmatism as an interpretive philosophical tradition includes:

Viewing reality as characterized by indeterminacy and fluidity, and as open to multiple interpretations. Pragmatism assumes that people are active and creative. In pragmatist philosophy, meanings emerge through practical actions to solve problems and through actions people come to know the world. Pragmatists see facts and values as linked rather than separate and truth as relativistic and provisional. (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010, p. 609)

Similarly, symbolic interactionism situates itself in constructivist grounded theory as well. A theoretical perspective deriving from pragmatism, symbolic interactionism assumes:

That people construct selves, society, and reality through interaction. Because this perspective focuses on dynamic relationships between meaning and actions, it addresses the active processes through which people create and mediate meanings. Meanings arise out of actions, and in turn influence actions. This perspective assumes that individuals are active, creative, and reflective and that social life consists of processes. (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010, p. 610)

Social constructivism as a theoretical perspective also needs consideration when discussing grounded theory and epistemology. According to Bryant and Charmaz (2010):

Social constructivism assumes that people create social reality(ies) through individual and collective actions. Rather than seeing the world as given, constructionists ask, how is it accomplished? Thus instead of assuming realities in an external world-including global structures and local cultures-social constructionists study what people take as real, how they construct their views and actions, when different constructions arise, whose constructions become taken as definitive, and how that process ensues. (p. 610)

Finally, postmodern perspectives need to be considered in a constructivist grounded theory approach. While Charmaz (2006) does not make this link explicit, she opens the door to the possibility:

The logical extension of the constructivist approach means learning how, when, and to what extent the studied experience is embedded in larger and, often, hidden positions, networks, situations, and relationships. Subsequently, differences and distinctions between people become visible as well as the hierarchies of power, communication, and opportunity that maintain and perpetuate such differences.

(p. 130)

Despite the number of theoretical perspectives that can be linked to a constructivist grounded theory approach, Charmaz (2006) offers comfort in questioning if grounded theory needs to be tied to a single epistemology. Her position is succinct and clear: “I think not. Just as grounded theory methods need not be tied to a single method of

data collection, or emerge from a specific theoretical perspective, the methods need not be tied to a single epistemology” (p. 178).

Charmaz (2006) argues that a constructivist grounded theory approach “explicitly assumes that any theoretical rendering offers an interpretive portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it” (p. 10). She reinforces that “research participants’ implicit meanings, experiential views-and researchers’ finished grounded theories-are constructions of reality” (p. 10). She concludes:

In the classic grounded theory works, Glaser and Strauss talk about discovering theory as emerging from the data separate from the scientific observer. Unlike their position, I assume that neither the data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices. (p. 10)

Summary

Against this background, the theoretical influences linked to a constructivist grounded theory methodology fit with the focus of this research. The symbolic interactionist aspect of grounded theory assumes that one’s communications and behaviours express meanings as influenced by social conditions and interactions around them (Blumer, 1969; Grbich, 1999; Mead, 1964). In addition, pragmatism emphasizes meaning, action, and process. Pragmatists view reality as being open to multiple interpretations and assume that people are active participants with individual creativity, perspective, and voice. In pragmatist philosophy, meanings emerge through practical actions to solve problems and through actions people come to know the world.

I was attracted to the interpretive and interactive nature of this study. I was comfortable with the epistemological position constructivist grounded theory is rooted in. I wanted my work to reflect an interpretivist construct and value the contributions of its symbolic interactionist and social constructionist antecedents. By using a constructivist grounded theory methodology, I was able to acknowledge and include my worldview during both the data collection and analysis processes. This methodology allowed me to capture my thoughts and questions while at the same time give voice to those emanating in the data. I chose a constructivist grounded theory research design with clearly defined methods that included intensive interviews, elicited responses, and the examination of SIPs with multiple phases of analysis in the hopes of learning more about how teachers and administrators use SIPs and the changes that result.

Accounting for Interpretation Bias: A Constructivist Point of View

The grounded theory methodology uses methods that generate data through interviews primarily, but also through the engagement of the researchers themselves as participants (Charmaz, 2006). These interviews often become discussions with rich insights generated from the participants' views and understandings of their world and interpreted by the inherent bias of the researcher (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Merriam (2002) notes that qualitative research places the researcher as “the primary instrument of inquiry for data collection and analysis” (p. 5). As such, to avoid the likelihood of confirmation bias (Isaac & Michael, 1997), increased efforts were taken to account for my biases in the analysis and interpretation of the data. Confirmation bias refers to a researcher's natural tendency to place preconceived ideas on the data (Charmaz, 2006). Yet, as the researcher, my background allowed for a rich analysis

because of my familiarity with the research topic. Charmaz (2006) presented the constructivist position on bias:

We are not scientific observers who can dismiss scrutiny of our values by claiming neutrality and authority. Neither observer nor observed came to the scene untouched by the world. Researcher and research participants make assumptions about what is real, possess stocks of knowledge, occupy social statuses, and pursue purposes that influence their respective views and actions in the presence of each. (p. 15)

A constructivist research approach assumes that the researcher draws realities from the research and each reality is equally legitimate (Isaac & Michael, 1997).

Accounting for any bias in this research was addressed by constantly comparing field notes, emerging themes using codes, and in memo writing. During the interview process an impression would be recorded in my field notes. These impressions might be considered a bias and either were legitimized as the interview unfolded and verified by codes or simply did not evolve in the data. Memo writing confirmed the legitimacy of any bias by constantly comparing field notes, memos, and the codes within the data itself. The methods chosen for this research were “iterative and flexible” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 5) and proposed originally in the research plan. In short, to minimize any bias, the use of a qualitative, grounded theory methodology was chosen because any conclusions would be grounded in the data, exclusive of personal bias.

Executing the Research Plan: Participant Recruitment

Measures for Ethical Protection

Before the study began, permission from the University of New Brunswick's Research Ethics Board (Appendix A) was obtained. Written approval in the form of a signed letter of consent was obtained from all participants that included the Superintendent of one school district in New Brunswick (Appendix B), school administrators (Appendix C), and teachers (Appendix D). These approvals ensured participants' confidentiality and rights to privacy. This included the right to meet outside of school as well as assurances that no identifying information would be used in the study. Each participant was also assured that the identifying information shared with me would not be disclosed to anyone and that all research records would be kept in a secure, locked location. Any personal or professional information disclosed during the interview process that could be used to identify participants was deleted during transcription. In a similar fashion, the request for the elicited responses contained no information to identify participants. The recording equipment was a digital recorder used during the interviews and remained private and secure at all times and was stored in a locked filing cabinet either at my home or office. The laptop computer I used during data collection was password protected and only used in my home. The transcribed interviews used pseudonyms for participants' names. The elicited responses asked participants to respond to two questions. No identifying information was requested.

School Selection and the Recruitment Process

Before data collection began, a meeting was requested with the Superintendent of one school district in New Brunswick. The district selected was in close proximity to my

home and contained numerous elementary schools from which to recruit participants. The purpose of the meeting with the Superintendent was to inform him of the study as well as to ask permission to approach various school principals to participate in the study. A letter of description and a consent form (Appendix B) with a self-addressed return envelope (Appendix E) was provided to him. At the end of the meeting, the Superintendent approved of the study by signing the consent form. A copy of the signed consent form by the Superintendent was then sent to the Research Ethics Board.

Given the geographic size of the school district, the initial selection of schools and participants was decided by the researcher based on three criteria. The first criterion required the schools to be in close proximity to my home to avoid excessive travel time and expense. The second criterion required that only elementary schools would be involved in the study. The rationale for this was based on the premise that I was most familiar with this context especially in relation to any strategies contained in the SIP that would potentially surface during the interview process and the review of the SIP itself. In short, I felt my background experience at the elementary level would assist me in conversations with participants. The third criterion involved the participants themselves and their familiarity with the SIP process. I wanted to include only school administrators and teachers with previous and current experience with school improvement planning. I wanted to exclude beginning teachers, assuming that their contributions would be limited and their focus would be on surviving their first year teaching! In grounded theory, sampling is theoretical; that is, participants are selected for what they can contribute to the emerging theory (Glaser, 1978). Participants needed to be English-speaking teachers currently employed in the selected schools with some experience and familiarity of

school improvement planning. I screened participants for eligibility at the outset of the interview using four screening questions to assess their experience with school improvement planning (Appendix F). Teachers who answered positively to any one of these questions were eligible to participate in the study. Data collected in these screenings ensured sample eligibility and allowed me to describe the range of experience participants had with school improvement planning. Demographic and employment information, educational background, ethnicity, gender or any other personal characteristics of the participants were not part of any eligibility criteria.

Against this background, the initial contact with schools was made via email (Appendix G) to 12 elementary school principals inviting them to participate in the study and asking them to meet to discuss the study further. From the initial contact with these principals, four responded via email. Three of the four school principals requested to meet face-to-face to learn more about the study. One school principal responded via email and indicated his interest in the study, but because he was going on a leave midway through the year, declined to participate. Another school principal, after meeting face-to-face, indicated that this was her first year at the school and that the study did not fit with what the staff was going to be doing during the school year and declined to participate. This left two principals and some of their staff willing to participate. Concerned about having participants represented in both an urban and rural context and the potential of discovering differences relating to this characteristic, I approached a principal of an elementary-middle school in a rural setting and invited him to participate in the study.

I met with each school principal individually and provided an overview of the study with clear timelines as well as what the data collection process would look like. I asked

each school principal to participate in the data collection process as well. In addition, I offered to present an overview of the study to the school staff at a staff meeting. A mutually agreed upon date was arranged for the presentation about the study at a staff meeting using a PowerPoint presentation (Appendix H). At the conclusion of the presentation I handed out to the administrators' Letters of Description and Consent Forms (Appendix C), teachers' Letters of Description and Consent Forms (Appendix D) with return self-addressed envelopes (Appendix E) inviting them to participate in the study.

Number of Participants

Predicting a precise sample size when using grounded theory is problematic (Glaser, 1978); however, I was able to recruit six teachers and three school administrators for this study. Recruitment was voluntary and facilitated by the presentations I made to the teaching staff along with the letters of description that I provided to them to explain the study. The initial sampling was determined by the response to the presentations made to each school staff. As these presentations were scheduled close together, the responses to the letters of description with signed consent forms began to appear in the mail. To respond to all of the participants' interest in the study, I decided to begin with three participants in one school and schedule others at a later date. This allowed for initial sampling to take place and provided me with the flexibility to decide if the evolving theory required additional sampling. If so, the participants in the second school could be engaged in the data collection process. I wanted to ensure that the data to generate a substantive theory about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their schools were sufficient and that no new information was emerging from the data. This sampling procedure, known as theoretical sampling, was used to identify emerging theories until they

were saturated and the theory permeated throughout the data. New information emerged in the second school indicating that data saturation was yet to occur. Data saturation occurs when categories of data begin to repeat themselves with no new information emerging. Analysis of each interview took place after the interview was completed. I knew that I needed to explore the research question further and what should be sampled next (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) after all of the interviews in the first school were completed.

Data Collection

Charmaz (2006) challenges researchers using grounded theory methodology to “choose methods that help you answer your research question with ingenuity and incisiveness” (p. 15). My research explores how teachers and administrators use school improvement plans to make change in their schools. Using a constructivist grounded theory methodology, I chose to use three methods to gather data to answer my research question. These methods included intensive interviewing, elicited responses, and extant text analysis. These converging data sources triangulated the data to explore multiple perspectives. Triangulating data is commonly used in quantitative research to test validity and reliability. However, it is not disregarded in qualitative studies. Golafshani (2003) “does not disregard the notion of triangulation in qualitative paradigm and states the need to define triangulation from a qualitative research’s perspective in each paradigm” (p. 603). Therefore, I acknowledge that this study used a constructivist grounded theory methodology. My interpretations were socially constructed and as noted by Crotty’s (1998) definition of constructivism took “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted

within an essentially social context” (p. 42). The goal of qualitative research is “to engage in research that probes for deeper understanding rather than examining surface features” (Johnson, 1995, p. 4). Through the constructivist lens of this study, the value of multiple realities and perspectives gathered using the methods described helped to answer the research question. Triangulation in the constructivism paradigm can enhance the quality of this study and “is related to generalizability of the result and thereby to the testing and increasing the validity or trustworthiness of the research” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 603).

At the outset of this study as a novice researcher I felt compelled to use three methods of data collection based on what I was reading and learning at the time. The notion of triangulation was more familiar to me in the quantitative tradition as a test for validity and reliability. Later on in my research, I discovered terms that I feel are more appropriate for this qualitative study that have to do with the trustworthiness of this work. I discuss this further at the end of this chapter. What follows next is a brief discussion about each method used to collect data in this study.

Intensive Interviewing

Intensive interviewing was used to provide an in-depth exploration of my research question and proved to be a useful method for interpretive inquiry (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, 1995). As Charmaz (2006) points out, an interesting aspect of using intensive interviewing from a grounded theory perspective is for the researcher to consider the “starting” point of the interview itself based on Blumer’s (1969) notion of sensitizing concepts: “These concepts give you initial ideas to pursue and sensitize you to ask particular kinds of questions about your topic” (p. 16).

Charmaz (2006) advises:

For a grounded theory study, devise a few broad, open-ended questions. Then you can focus your interview question to invite detailed discussion of the topic. By creating open-ended, non-judgemental questions, you encourage unanticipated statements and stories to emerge. The combination of how you construct the questions and conduct the interview shapes how well you achieve a balance between making the interview open-ended and focusing on significant statements. (p. 26)

I prepared a list of questions about SIPs (Appendix I) as a means to get participants to talk about their experience; however, my intent was to use these questions only as a back-up if the conversation stalled. My approach to the interview was informal, but semi-structured. The approach began with this lead-in to the interview:

As you are aware I am interested in learning about what you do with the school improvement plan in your school. Maybe you would like to begin by telling me how you use the school improvement plan in your work at this school.

This approach worked well and allowed participants to engage in conversations about their experiences with school improvement planning rather than direct participants to answer a series of scripted questions. Glaser (1978) notes that as data collection and coding unfold, the lead-in conversation can vary to further explore concepts and the emerging theory. In fact, subsequent interviews began with me asking each participant to explore particular areas from the previous interview until no new information was revealed. This adherence to a qualitative grounded theory design throughout the data collection process

allowed the initial data collection and analysis to occur simultaneously and generate categories. Subsequent interviews allowed for these categories to be refined and verified.

As detailed in the letters of description provided to the participants and during initial contact through email, participants were given the option to meet outside of their schools after school hours if they wished. All participants wanted to meet in their schools during regular school hours. The interviews were conducted in teachers' classrooms or school administrators' offices and lasted between 20 and 50 minutes each. In total 27 interviews took place. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Interviews took place intermittently to allow for transcription, analysis, and decisions regarding theoretical sampling. In most cases, the interviews took place between three and seven days apart with a few weeks between schools. Interviews began in late October 2014 and continued over an eight-month period with interruptions taking place around school holidays, school report cards, and predetermined professional development dates that sometimes made teacher availability and scheduling challenging.

At the beginning of the initial interview, I thanked each participant for agreeing to participate, provided a quick overview of the study, and explicitly stated the research question. After exchanging pleasantries, the initial interview began with a lead-in statement like the one noted above or a summary statement that included areas I wanted to explore with them based on their previous interview. During the interview process I maintained a relaxed, inviting posture, always made eye contact, and paid close attention to both my nonverbal communication and that of the participant. These nonverbal cues from the participant were often in the form of eye contact, smiles, or nods, as well as open or closed body posture. Being aware of my body language and the participants' aided in developing a

friendly rapport so that discussions flowed and were relaxed and conversational, and were intended to create a rapport that would help the participants to go beneath the surface of the described experience and explore a category with more detail and explanation. I felt the interview process allowed me to capture the participant's thoughts, feelings, and actions, and validate their perspectives (Charmaz, 2006).

I believe the intensive interview method corresponded well to the research question. As Charmaz (2006) notes, "both grounded theory methods and intensive interviewing are open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet with flexible approaches" (p. 28). Charmaz succinctly distinguishes a critical difference in a constructivist and objectivist approach to interviewing:

A constructivist would emphasize eliciting the participant's definitions of terms, situations, and events, and try to tap his or her assumptions, implicit meanings, and tacit rules. An objectivist would be concerned with obtaining information about chronology, events, settings, and behaviors. (p. 32)

The data collected using intensive interviewing determined the number of successive interviews after the initial coding of each interview took place. All participants were interviewed three times. The first interview explored the roles and responsibilities of the participants themselves and their general experience with the SIP in their school. During the second round of interviews, I explored further the key themes resulting from the first interview, but in more depth, particularly how they used the SIPs in the work they do in their school. The final interview explored any of these structures, both formal and informal, inherent in their workplace along with participant perceptions of the changes that resulted. Each time at the outset of the next interview I

highlighted some of the areas I wanted to explore further as a lead-in for participants to begin the discussion. Sporadically, throughout the interview, especially during what I thought was a key point, I took the liberty of summarizing their statement, while at the same time making a quick point of it in my journal. These notes often informed follow-up memos about the interview itself and provided a starting point for subsequent interviews along with the data analyzed. Field notes about observations and insights were collected during and after each interview and constantly compared with the emerging theory.

A constructivist approach to interviewing allowed for the flexibility to pursue an interview tone that was conversational, interactive, and engaging. It permitted ideas and issues to emerge that were ultimately matched with the findings from the other sources of information like extant texts.

Extant Texts

In this study, extant text referred to the SIP itself. As a legitimate source of data, SIPs were compared to what teachers revealed in their interviews and from their elicited responses. Charmaz (2006) concludes that “exploring the purposes and objectives of records allows placing them into perspective and perhaps seeking more data from other sources” (p. 37). Extant text can complement interview methods by challenging the researcher to consider some of the following questions:

What are the parameters of the information? On what and whose facts does the information rest? What does the information mean to various participants? What does the information leave out? Who is the intended

audience for the information? How, if at all, does the information affect actions? (p. 38)

In the very least, extant texts, as another source of data, can provide information that is independent of the researcher's interview. The SIPs in this study changed very little so that they were a good source of information to spark new questions, elicit undiscovered concepts or categories or inform emerging theories. Charmaz (2006) concludes:

Comparisons between field notes and written documents spark new insights about the relative congruence-or lack of it-between words and deeds. Both organizational rhetoric and reports may pale in the face of observed worlds. These texts may fulfill intriguing organizational purposes, but researchers cannot assume that they mirror organizational processes. Thus, such texts may provide useful statements about an organization's professed images and claimed objectives-the front stage view aimed to shape its public reputation. (p. 38)

If nothing else, the SIPs of each school offered a means to examine their contents and explore the structure of the plan, the research participants' relationship to it, and the actions and interactions behind the creation or implementation of the plan. "Grounded theories of textual material can address form as well as content, audience as well as authors, and production of the text as well as presentation of it" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 40). My observations of the SIPs themselves in relation to the other data sources are discussed in chapter 5.

Elicited Responses

“Elicited texts involve research participants in writing the data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 36). Elicited texts can come in the form of keeping diaries, writing daily logs, or answering written questions.

In this study, at the end of the interview process, each participant was invited to respond to two questions. These questions identified in the letters of description (Appendices C and D) provided to both the school administrators and teachers were worded slightly differently, but essentially asked the same thing. These were the questions for the administrators:

1. How do teachers use the school improvement plan in their work at this school?
2. Does the use of the school improvement plan result in making change in this school? If so, describe the change.

These were questions for the teachers:

1. How do you use the school improvement plan in your work at this school?
2. Does the use of the school improvement plan result in making change in this school? If so, describe the change.

Participants were invited through email to complete the questions. Following the email, I prepared a letter to teachers (Appendix J) and school administrators (Appendix K) echoing the same request and dropped it off to them at their schools. Each question was written at the top of the front and back of a piece of paper with no identifying information requested. Both the letter of invitation and a copy of the questions were attached with a return self-addressed envelope (Appendix E).

As Charmaz (2006) notes:

Elicited texts can foster frank disclosures that a person might not want to make to an interviewer. These texts, like published autobiographies, may elicit thoughts, feelings, and concerns of the thinking, acting subject as well as give researchers ideas about what structures and cultural values influenced the person. (p. 36).

Only two elicited responses were received in the mail and are discussed in chapter 5.

Other Data Sources

Along with the review of SIPs, I used other sources of information as well. These included data from the New Brunswick School Improvement Surveys as well as the New Brunswick School Improvement Review reports. The School Improvement Survey is administered to teachers on a regular basis and measures the extent of their satisfaction according to various themes relating to school effectiveness. I reviewed the survey and statements relating to the SIPs or others that connected to the data and used them as part of the analysis. In a similar fashion, data from the School Improvement Review process were reviewed for any information relating to SIPs and changes that resulted over time.

A final source of information was student achievement data in the area of reading at Grade 2 accessed from the New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. This is the only source of student achievement data available to teachers and administrators in elementary schools. The data were analyzed to identify any changes in achievement results.

Collectively I was interested in comparing the data emerging from the interviews, the elicited responses, and the extant texts with other data sources generated about the schools involved in the study to demonstrate if changes were occurring in the schools.

Data Analysis Overview

The audiotaped interviews were transcribed verbatim. The elicited responses were collected and the SIPs acquired. Beginning with the interviews, I began the coding process. While the techniques or procedures to analyze data using a grounded theory methodology were not made explicit in my review of the literature, I quickly learned about several names of codes and their purposes. Each of these will be described in greater detail in the next chapter. However, for this discussion I refer to the work done by Piantanida et al. (2004) to outline and even simplify what they refer to as “three tiers of codes” (p. 330):

We have found it helpful to think in terms of a minimum of three tiers of codes. The first tier consists of substantive codes still closely tied to the idiosyncrasies of the situation. By comparing substantive codes, we begin to cluster them based on what seem to be related characteristics or ideas. A second tier of concepts is more abstract, providing language to describe what we sense is meaningful about the various clusters of substantive codes. This level of coding begins to point to the nuances and complexities (e.g. issues, concerns, dilemmas, problematics) related to the phenomenon under study. The third tier is even more abstract, providing conceptual language to describe and explain the relationships among codes. We have come to see this move toward the third conceptual tier as the level at which more substantive theorizing occurs, although the grounded theory is being developed throughout the inquiry process. (p. 339)

In my analysis of the data, I referred to this explanation time and again. It served a few purposes, beginning with knowing that as I was coding the data I was doing it in a way that resembled what the grounded theory methodology advocated. At first, the nebulousness of grounded theory methodology overwhelmed me. I was particularly perplexed by how I would use these codes to develop a substantive theory. The “three tiers of codes” (p. 330) work by Piantanida et al. (2004) helped me understand the codes and their purposes and also helped inform the development of an analysis framework that I will discuss in greater detail in the next chapter. Given the “ambiguities of grounded theory” and in the absence of a “singular, pristine model of ‘true’ grounded theory” (p. 330), being able to understand the types of codes and their purpose was essential not only to figuring out coding techniques but most importantly to laying out a “logic-of justification for the theorizing process” (p. 330). I will discuss what this means later in this chapter.

Secondly, the “three tiers of codes” (p. 330) reinforce that grounded theory methodology is not linear in nature but rather recursive in process. That is, the development of the theory does not take place after all of the data are coded but rather while the data are being analyzed. Codes are compared, as are their characteristics, along with relationships that exist between them or within categories to a point that no new categories of data are being discovered. This is referred to as theoretical saturation. Made known originally by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the grounded theory concept of *theoretical saturation* is a “condition that is achieved when no additional informational data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category” (p. 61). It is these twin processes of coding and constant comparative analysis that lead to

plausible theories that are continuously being hypothesized, refined, revised, and strengthened throughout the analytical process.

A final comfort taken from the “tiers of codes” (p. 330) depiction by Piantanida et al. (2004) was the realization that grounded theory methodology can be liberating for the researcher. That is, it is not so much about striving “for methodological purity or to choose the ‘right’ version of the method” (p. 331) but rather how “the grounded theory researcher makes explicit the connections among research paradigm, strategies, and techniques” (p. 331). I found this to be the exciting part of the analysis, particularly the relationships I found not only within the categories of data but among them too. As Charmaz (2003) notes, “grounded theory methods evolve in different ways depending on the perspectives and proclivities of their adherents” (p. 528), and by exploring those underpinnings “we can acknowledge the limits of our studies and how we shape them” (p. 528).

Against this background, what follows is a brief description of how I analyzed the data. I chose to offer more detail about the coding terms, aspects of grounded theory and the analysis framework I constructed to make sense of the data in the next chapter simply because I needed to make explicit my decisions about the data at the same time that I was discussing the findings grounded in the data.

The Analysis Process

Open coding of interview transcripts line-by-line (Glaser, 1978) took place after each interview using as many codes as required to name what was happening in the data (Wuest, 2007). To help generate codes, I used the guiding question, “What is this data a study of?” (Glaser, 1978, p. 57), along with standard questions (Appendix L) suggested by Choivitti and Piran (2003) to establish a consistent format in the coding. Piantanida et

al. (2004) refer to this as the first tier of coding. Codes were then compared for similarities and differences. Similar codes were clustered in categories through constant comparison (second tier of coding). Relationships among categories were identified through memo writing as they relate to the main problem about what was being studied (Wuest, 2007). These relationships were confirmed through theoretical sampling as data were collected with each new participant. Attempts to generate hypotheses about categories, their relationships and interrelationships (third tier of coding) and to test these hypotheses with data at each phase of analysis took place. Once completed, the main problem and core categories were then identified and named (Wuest, 2007). The core categories were grounded in the data and most talked about by the participants. These categories were then organized using theoretical coding. Theoretical coding refers to the process of examining data in theoretical rather than descriptive terms (Glaser, 1978) to raise the level of abstraction in the emerging theory. Emerging theories were identified at the conclusion of each round of interviews. The second round of interviews added codes, categories, relationships between the categories, new memos, and additional attempts at theory development. This pattern ensued until theoretical saturation occurred. This approach made clear the participants' contribution to the emerging theories while at the same time exposed their current experience and practices with the SIP.

Data from interviews with the second and subsequent participants were used to refine the developing theory (Charmaz, 2003). In order to attain "saturation of categories" it was necessary to revisit the data many times and from them define the parameters of further data collection. Usually this was done right after the interview took place and recorded in my field notes so that I could remember which category to

explore further in subsequent interviews. Saturation is the point at which the participants have no more to say and an overall pattern can be seen in the data such that clear agreement emerges between all or most of the people interviewed, and where their differences are explained (Dick, 1990). All memos were constantly compared to any new codes or categories as well as to emerging theories. Memos were often shuffled around and arranged by their titles into what made sense to me and how they linked to the data. Memos were used to identify the underlying themes that tied categories together and provided the basis of a substantive theory about how teachers and administrators used SIPs to make change in their schools.

All the terms discussed here, details about how the data were analyzed and the decisions I made throughout the process are made explicit in the next chapter.

Moving Toward a Logic-of-Justification

Until this point I focused on providing a brief overview of the data analysis process and briefly introduced “three tiers of codes” (Piantanida et al., 2004, p. 330) with the promise of more explanation about them and other aspects of grounded theory in the chapter that follows. What is of most importance in the understanding of grounded theory methodology is not “procedural orthodoxy” or “precise execution of technique (e.g. strict adherence to ‘rules’ for coding and analyzing data)” (Piantanida et al., 2004, p. 335) but rather the “distinction between method as technique/strategy and method as logic-of-justification” (p. 335). Piantanida et al. (2004) continue by adding: “Warranting an interpretive grounded theory entails making explicit the logics the researcher followed in carrying out the inquiry process. Inevitably, logics must be custom crafted to fit the intent and procedures of each grounded theory study” (p. 335).

The data analysis framework I designed for this study was “custom crafted to fit the intent” (Piantanida et al., 2004, p. 335) of this study. I discuss it in greater detail alongside the data in the next chapter. Unlike “an objectivist axiology, ontology or epistemology in which we strive to identify ‘typical behaviours’ and warrant those behaviours as generalized ‘knowledge of human nature’” (Piantanida et al., 2004, p. 335), this study worked within “an interpretive axiology, ontology and epistemology” (Piantanida et al., 2004, p. 335) as I examined the contextual features of how teachers and administrators used SIPs and the changes that resulted. The data analysis framework was designed in a way that I blended the coding techniques advocated in the grounded theory literature with criteria of significance that I introduced to make decisions about the voluminous amount of data I needed to analyze. Authors like Hirschkorn (2008) and Piantanida et al. (2004) acknowledge that decisions about data need to be made during analysis and the logics behind these decisions need to be made explicit. It also must be recognized that not “every aspect of every text will be equally ripe with meaning” (Piantanida et al., 2004, p. 338).

Beyond making explicit the decisions made about the data using various coding techniques twinned with a constant comparative analysis process, the power of grounded theory methodology lies in the researcher’s ability to go beyond discussions about its idiosyncrasies and move toward the theoretic. Piantanida et al. (2004) caution: “To theorize, however, we must be able to bring a conceptual perspective to the situation and the individual experience” (p. 335). This is the rationale for the data analysis framework introduced in the next chapter along with other interpretive logics used in this study. These include the four types of codes I used during each of the four

levels of data analysis along with the three criteria of significance I introduced to make decisions about the data. Other interpretive logics characteristic of grounded theory methodology expanded upon include theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling, coding, and constant comparative analysis. Understanding these terms and their use in the development of a substantive theory sheds light on what makes a grounded theory study legitimate and provides confidence that the “theory really explains the phenomenon under study” (p. 331).

Generating a substantive theory about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their schools was the focus of this study. Concurrently, the notion of legitimizing the work I undertook was just as important. Falling into the crosscurrents at play between the use of triangulation to test for reliability and validity in quantitative research, I discovered research by Golafshani (2003) who wanted to find out if the concept of triangulation could be used to test for reliability and validity in qualitative research. Beginning with reliability, Golafshani (2003) offers the following definition:

The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study...and if the results of a study can be produced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable. (p. 1)

He also offers a definition for validity:

Validity determines whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are. In other words, does the research instrument allow you to hit the “bulls eye” of your research

object? Researchers generally determine validity by asking a series of questions, and will often look for the answers in the research of others. (p. 1)

Golafshani (2003) sums up these terms succinctly:

Insofar as the definitions of reliability and validity in quantitative research reveal two strands: Firstly, with regards to reliability whether the result is replicable.

Secondly, with regards to validity, whether the means of measurement are accurate and whether they are actually measuring what they are intended to measure. (p. 599)

Golafshani (2003) quickly points out the problem using these terms for qualitative research: “The concepts of reliability and validity are viewed differently by qualitative researchers who strongly consider these concepts defined in quantitative terms as inadequate” (p. 600). He concludes: “In other words, these terms as defined in quantitative terms may not apply to the qualitative research paradigm” (p. 600). Instead, he proposes that “the most important test of any qualitative study is its quality” (p. 601). As Eisner (1991) points out, “a good qualitative study can help us understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing” (p. 58). Stenbacka (2001) makes clear the difference associated with quality in quantitative and qualitative research. She concludes: “This relates to the concept of a good quality research when reliability is a concept to evaluate quality in quantitative study with a ‘purpose of explaining’ while quality concept in qualitative study has the purpose of “generating understanding” (p. 551). Clearly, the differences in purpose matter. Once again, according to Stenbacka (2001), “the concept of reliability is even misleading in qualitative research. If a

qualitative study is discussed with reliability as a criterion, the consequence is rather that the study is no good” (p. 552).

Conversely, Patton (2002) states that qualitative researchers must concern themselves with the notions of validity and reliability when designing a study, analyzing results and judging its quality. While validity and reliability are most often associated with the positivist or scientific paradigm, Lincoln and Guba (1985) raise the question that all researchers need to consider: “How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?” (p. 290). Healy and Perry (2000) assert that the quality of a study regardless of which research paradigm it identifies itself with needs to be judged by its own paradigm's terms. Golafshani (2003) offers the following alternative and states: “While the terms reliability and validity are essential criterion for quality in quantitative paradigms, in qualitative paradigms the terms Credibility, Neutrality or Conformity, Consistency or Dependability, and Applicability or Transferability are to be the essential criteria for quality” (p. 601).

Beyond what term is used in qualitative studies to address the equivalent of reliability in quantitative studies, Stenbacka (2001) stands firm and argues that since reliability “concerns measurement then it has no relevance in qualitative research” (p. 552). The “congruence of reliability and validity in qualitative research” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 601) is further complicated by what Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited by Golafshani, 2003) state: “Since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former (validity) is sufficient to establish the latter (reliability)” (p. 316). Patton (2002, cited by Golafshani, 2003) agrees and deduces that “reliability is a consequence of the validity in a study” (p. 602).

Similar to the issues around reliability and its use in qualitative research, the concept of validity in qualitative studies has come under criticism as well. “Although some qualitative researchers have argued that the term validity is not applicable in qualitative research, but at the same time, they have realized the need for some kind of qualifying check or measure of their research” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 602). Other researchers have chimed in to this debate and developed their own concepts of validity. These include quality, rigor, and trustworthiness (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mishler, 2000; Stenbacka, 2001).

In short, quality in qualitative research, as was referenced earlier (Eisner, 1991; Stenbacka, 2001), denotes the ability to generate understanding of a particular phenomenon under study. Davies and Dodd (2002) touch on the term *rigor* in reference to discussions about reliability and validity. They argue for the need to “move on to develop our reconception of rigor by exploring subjectivity, reflexivity, and the social interaction of interviewing” (p. 281). Charmaz (2003) relies on Glaser’s (1978) criteria of fit, grab, work, and modifiability to evaluate the rigor of a grounded theory study. “In grounded theory, fit is the extent to which concepts fit with the incidents being described” (Rich, 2012, p. 10). Grab refers to how a grounded theory resonates for those to whom it is relevant. “By work, we mean that a theory should be able to explain what happened, predict what will happen, and interpret what is happening in an area of substantive or formal inquiry” (Glaser, 1978, p. 4). Modifiability refers to the adaptation of a theory over time due to changing social conditions (Charmaz, 2003).

Finally, as Golafshani (2003) points out, the validity or trustworthiness of the research relates to the quality of the study in a manner that if tested can offer a

“credible and defensible result” (Johnson, 1997, p. 283) that may lead to the generalizability of the result. Or, in other words did the study establish “confidence in the findings”? (Golafshani, 2003 p. 602)

Regardless of the terms developed by qualitative researchers to demonstrate the quantitative equivalents of validity and reliability, what remains central to grounded theory methodology is the recognition that generating theory is an interpretive act. Even if grounded theorists followed a disciplined process to develop concepts grounded in the data, Piantanida et al. (2004) observe that “meanings do not lie dormant in data waiting to be discovered” (p. 341). It is not until the researcher can “see possible and plausible relationships among them” (p. 335) that a grounded theory begins to develop. Most importantly, “it is the researcher’s portrayal of these conceptual relationships that constitute a grounded theory” (p. 335) and “the persuasiveness with which the researcher lays out his/her lines of reasoning and the concepts and the relationships among them” (p. 335).

Piantanida et al. (2004) conclude that when researchers use grounded theory methodology, “they take on an obligation of portraying the experiential ground of the substantive theory. It is the verisimilitude with which the ground is portrayed that serves as the starting point for warranting a substantive grounded theory” (p. 341). According to Piantanida et al. 2004, “verisimilitude means that the phenomenon and context under study have been rendered with sufficient detail that they are recognized as ‘truly conceivable experience’” (p. 341). This means that when the researcher has, according to Piantanida et al., “generated substantive codes with sensitivity and insight” (p. 341) about aspects of the data and the relationships among them that informed the

substantive theory, others should be able to relate to and understand better the phenomenon under study.

Since, according to Piantanida et al. (2004), “grounded theories are understood to be heuristic, not predictive, in nature” (p. 335) and account for the researcher’s interpretations, they claim “the scientific warrants of verifiability, reliability, validity, and generalizability are not applicable criteria for evaluating the credibility of the theory” (p. 341). Instead, the authors suggest another option:

More relevant criteria would include rigor, ethics, integrity, verite, utility, vitality and aesthetics. In other words, does the portrayal of the inquiry provide evidence that the research was conducted in a rigorous and ethical manner and does the substantive theory have a coherent conceptual integrity; does it ring true; does it offer useful insights; does it have vitality and aesthetic richness to be persuasive? (p. 341)

I like the simplicity of these criteria and will use them to justify a heuristic rendering of my interpretations of the data collected. This will be discussed further at the end of chapter 5 after I reveal my substantive theory of how teachers and administrators used SIPs to make change in their schools.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology used in this qualitative, grounded theory study. It identified the purpose and objectives of the study and provided a rationale for the qualitative approach that was used. A grounded theory methodology was used to allow a substantive theory about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their schools to be generated from the data rather than forcing data into

preconceived categories. This chapter also provided a background to help understand the evolution of grounded theory along with the constructivist approach I used in this study and its corresponding epistemologies. In addition, details about ethical considerations relating to school and participant selection and recruitment were offered. This chapter concluded by providing details about the data collection methods and an overview of the data analysis process along with an articulation of how the research concepts of reliability and validity in quantitative research are juxtaposed with terms serving similar purposes in the qualitative research paradigm. The chapter concluded by revealing the criteria that will be used to comment on the verisimilitude of this study.

Chapter 4: Findings from the Interview Data

The research question that this study explored was *How do teachers and administrators utilize school improvement plans to make change in their schools?* Not only did I want to learn more about the effectiveness of school improvement planning (Fernandez, 2011), but I was also motivated by Reezigt's (2001) assertion that "the importance of the context has rarely been acknowledged and analyzed in the school improvement literature" (p. 72). Since teachers and administrators are at the center of any school context, it made sense to me that the research question and its findings could not only make a contribution to the school improvement planning discourse, but also lead to potential changes in how we look at the relationship between school context and the roles that teachers and administrators play when utilizing SIPs to make changes in their schools.

Given the voluminous amount of data collected and analyzed for this study, the findings were divided into two chapters. This chapter discusses the findings grounded in the data from the interviews only. The next chapter discusses the findings from other data sources.

The overall purpose of this chapter is to reveal how the categories and findings that were grounded in the data collected from the experiences of teachers and administrators led to the creation of a theory about *how teachers and administrators use school improvement plans to make change in their school*. It is organized into several sections. It begins with seeing possibilities within the voluminous amounts of data collected. It proceeds with explaining the constant comparative analysis process characteristic of the grounded theory methodology used in this research. It continues with a brief discussion about the need to

create a data analysis framework to deal with the large amount of data and introduces three criteria of significance used to make decisions about the data. The data analysis framework is then made explicit. Four phases of data analyses are discussed and the findings generated from each phase are revealed. The chapter concludes by using the findings to construct a grounded theory about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their school.

My research methodology was designed so that the majority of the data collected would be qualitative in nature. As I was organizing the codes placed on the data, frequency counts were made to determine *what was happening in the data* and *what it meant?* (Charmaz, 2006). I did not realize when the data collection process began that my research methods would produce an unequal and a voluminous amount of data. By looking at the frequency of the codes with their similarities and differences, I was able to organize the data into categories. These categories collectively represented the voices of teachers and administrators and their experiences.

Data Collection Methods

The three data collection methods used in this study included the examination of SIPs, collecting elicited responses from both teachers and administrators, and interviewing them. Table 4 summarizes and compares the data collection methods used and the amount of data generated from each method. I chose three descriptors not only to show how each method produced an unequal amount of data but also to offer a mental image of what the data looked like. These descriptors include: 1) voluminous (excessive >100 pages); 2) moderate (adequate <100 pages); and 3) minimal (limited <10 pages).

Table 4. Comparison of data collection methods to the amount of data generated from each method

Data Collection Methods	Amount of Data Generated
Interviews	Voluminous-extensive
Elicited Responses	Minimal-limited
School Improvement Plans	Moderate-adequate

Intertwined with these data collection methods were other sources of information that included data from the schools' provincial assessment results, school improvement surveys, and school review reports. This data served as an additional means to confirm what teachers and administrators were saying about the changes they were seeing as a result of their use of the SIP. I wanted to determine if there was any evidence of change in these sources of information that could be attributed to what was written in the SIPs, what teachers were telling me, or what was contained in their written responses. Determining if change occurred in the school was an important part of the research question and had to be explored using multiple data collection methods. Table 5 shows the relationship of the data sources to the research question. The research question (in two parts) shows both the primary sources of data as well as other sources of information used to determine if changes resulted from teachers and administrators using the school improvement plan.

Table 5. The relationship of the data sources to the research question.

RESEARCH QUESTION (in two parts)	
<i>How do teachers use school improvement plans...</i>	<i>... to make change in their schools?</i>
Primary Sources of Data	Other Sources of Information
Interviews	Provincial Assessment Results
Elicited Responses	School Review Reports
School Improvement Plans	Teacher Perception Surveys

Unbeknownst to me, when I began this research, was how valuable memo writing was to the generation of my theory. As Merriam and Simpson (2000) explain: “The researcher also codes records in memo form for any insights that occurred during the comparison of incidents” (p. 116). Most often, memo writing took place during initial coding “to begin noting interesting discrepancies, concepts, or anomalies” (Rich, 2012, p. 4). Memos are reflections on what is happening as researchers begin to analyze the data. As Henwood and Pidgeon (1995) suggest “conducting memoing and open coding as parallel cognitive operations allows sensitivities to existing literature and theory to be combined with a commitment to grounding in data” (p. 638). As part of the constant comparative analysis process required of grounded theory methodology, memo writing takes the form of making sense of the data by trying to respond to two questions as offered by Charmaz (2006): *What is happening in the data?* and *What does it mean?* These notes came from how I reacted to the data or links within them in the form of categories, properties, and dimensions, which will be described later in this chapter. My memos were collected in the form of a journal that I kept to capture notes before, during,

and after the interviews, as well as ideas that would trigger in response to the SIPs I was looking at, the transcribed interviews, or while immersed in the data as I was going back and forth across emerging codes or categories. Other memos were generated after I left the data and reflected on them. Still others occurred while driving and listening to the interviews over and over again. These notes were sometimes summary and descriptive in nature representing my impressions of what was going on at the time in the data as they were being analyzed and referred to time and again. At other times I would consolidate them periodically and attempt to generate theories about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their schools. These attempts at theory generation were initially made explicit in a paper I presented at the International Congress of School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI) in 2015. In that paper (Morrison, 2015), I questioned if there was any compelling evidence that school improvement planning was working in New Brunswick. I concluded the paper with a few plausible theories about school improvement planning based on the data I was working with at the time. It was during the writing of this article that I took a closer look at the data and began the task of analysing it.

Analyzing the Data

Given the voluminous amount of data particularly from the transcribed interviews, I became lost in it for some time. This is not a good feeling. To the novice researcher, coding data takes a lot of time especially using a grounded theory methodology that requires a constant comparison mindset. This means that as a researcher I was always returning to the data looking for confirmation of the same categories in new data while at the same time being aware of novel ones that were

emerging. This recursive process generates new insights from the data. For a researcher, analyzing the data after the first interview and then returning to the participant to explore a particular category further is a constructivist approach. As Charmaz (2003) points out, a constructivist grounded theory approach to constant comparative analysis means “the focus is on a mutual construction of knowledge by the researcher and participant and the ability to develop subjective understandings of participants’ meanings” (p. 510). This means that the mutual construction of the knowledge process is context bound. As such, a constructivist grounded theory “approach focuses on how the researcher constructs methods and methodological strategies and requires accountability of the study’s contexts and the researchers’ standpoint, priorities, and interaction” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010, p. 10). Against this background, Charmaz’s constructivist grounded theory approach made even more sense to me if I wanted to acknowledge how my experience with school improvement planning could shape the data I was analyzing. As Charmaz (2002) argues, classical grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) isolates categories to data, ignoring the social realities around the processes unfolding in the data. I wanted to avoid this and acknowledge both the social realities or experiences of teachers and administrators as they worked with their SIPs and my experience with school improvement planning to create a grounded theory about how teachers and administrators utilize SIPs to make change in their schools.

To this end, I needed to move the study along and make sense of what I was listening to (interview transcripts), analysing, and reading. With the realization of the amount of data I was dealing with, I got stuck in my interpretation of what the research

methodology was advocating. I was trying my best to interpret the grounded theory methodology that purported a data analysis procedure that began with *open* coding, moved to *focused* coding while drawing out properties and dimensions through *axial* coding, and culminated with *selective* coding for the purpose of theory generation. These coding terms and procedures were all new to me, and the expectation of *constantly comparing* data with emerging categories that were grounded in the data with emerging theories was daunting. I began by making sense of the coding terms. Each of them will be explained as this chapter unfolds.

Constant Comparative Analysis and Open Coding

Grounded theory requires researchers to constantly compare data with emerging concepts. The first stage of analysis begins with open coding. As Strauss and Corbin (1990) point out, coding is open because “to uncover, name, and develop concepts, we must open up the text and expose the thoughts, ideas, and meanings contained therein” (p. 102). Rich (2012) stipulates that “the idea of open coding is once again tied to the notion of grounded-ness, of letting concepts emerge from the data instead of force-fitting the data to *a priori* theory” (p. 3). Open coding can be done line by line, incident by incident, or by entire section. The main question to ask about the codes is *what is happening in the data?* (Charmaz, 2006). By doing so, researchers can draw out “distinctions that cause people to name something one way or the other” (Rich, 2012, p. 3). Open coding refers to exploring whatever theoretical possibilities can be discerned from the data. During open coding the researcher asks, “What is the data a study of? What does the data suggest? From whose point of view? What theoretical category does the datum indicate?” (Glaser, 1994, p. 47). Charmaz (2002) encourages researchers to

code their data using action verbs or gerunds like “learning the facts, or recounting the events” (p. 685). Charmaz (2006) advocates using the following questions to help see actions and identify significant processes:

What process(es) is at issue here? How can I define it? How does the process develop? How does the research participant(s) act while involved in the process?

What does the research participant(s) profess to think and feel while involved in the process? What might his or her observed behaviour indicate? When, why, and how does the process change? What are the consequences of the process? (p. 51)

As a novice researcher, my approach to using constant comparative analysis was to continually interact with the data by repeatedly going over the data and coding them into as many tentative categories as I thought were appropriate.

To say the least, grounded theory methodology at first appeared to me as complicated and I was sceptical if in fact a theory about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in schools could be generated. Certainly, in a review of several purported grounded theory studies, as part of my methodology comprehensive exam, I found that most studies fell short of generating any explicit example of a grounded theory that answered the research question using a grounded theory research design. Instead, many of these studies were thick descriptions of categories that perhaps were grounded in the data but not extended to the generation of a theory. I think this is due in large part to the difficulties of finding a framework to organize these coding methods with a clearly defined process of using them to generate a theory. I discovered the need to have a data analysis framework one day when I discussed the challenge of being lost in the data with one of my supervisors.

The Need for a Data Analysis Framework

Learning from Hirschkorn's (2008) conceptualization of a data analysis framework used in his study, I decided to construct my own. This was a turning point in the data analysis process. As Hirschkorn noted in his struggle to make sense of the data that surfaced in his study:

It became necessary to apply an analysis framework that allowed me to remain focused on the student teacher relationship and to present what I learned in a manner that suggested significance and relevance. A collection of seemingly random insights with no analytical structure or purpose is of little value. (p. 65)

This resonated with me and the construction of a data analysis framework seemed logical for two reasons. First, I needed to make clear the data analysis process. In short, this included the following steps:

1. applying open codes to the data
2. extending the open codes to focused codes
3. organizing the open codes with the focused codes
4. using the focused codes to look at similarities and differences; create categories; create axial codes; examine relationships within and across categories
5. extend axial code relationships to selective codes
6. construct a model using selective codes
7. generate a theory or theories using selective codes
8. refine the theory
9. reveal the theory
10. analyse the theory by commenting on the verisimilitude of the study

The second reason I needed to conceptualize a data analysis framework was to echo the importance of what Hirschkorn (2008) noted in relation to presenting what he learned “in a manner that suggested significance and relevance” (p. 65). In his study, Hirschkorn established a criterion of significance to make explicit how he “sorted and prioritized the categories and thus the data” (p. 73). He used *resonance* as a central theme to make sense of the data in his study. In short, the criteria of significance applied to his data included:

- “**group resonance**-which experiences were shared and described by the participants, or provoked the most resonant reaction in the group?
- **device resonance**-which experiences emerged in all the data collection methods?
- **individual resonance**-which experiences were returned to over and over again by a single participant?” (p. 76)

Hirschkorn notes that “as a data analysis tool, applying the criteria of significance to the categories was helpful to illustrate which categories were the most salient to the participants and thus, also the most salient to the study” (p. 76). In a similar fashion, one of Glaser’s (1978) criteria to judge a grounded theory is *grab*. *Grab* refers to how a grounded theory resonates for those to whom it is relevant. With these perspectives in mind, choosing *resonance* as the basis of each criterion of significance I developed made sense to me and allowed me to make decisions about what was happening in the data and what it meant in relation to generating a theory about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their schools.

Piggybacking on Hirschhorn's (2008) criteria of significance, I modified and extended his use of resonance to make sense of my data. In a similar fashion I used both *individual* and *group* resonance but defined them in different ways. The first criterion of significance I used in this study was *individual resonance* and was applied during open coding of the transcribed participant responses from each interview. Again, Charmaz's (2006) questions about looking at the data were used to help guide me:

What process(es) is at issue here? How can I define it? How does the process develop? How does the research participant(s) act while involved in the process? What does the research participant(s) profess to think and feel while involved in the process? What might his or her observed behaviour indicate? When, why, and how does the process change? What are the consequences of the process? (p. 51)

I wanted to capture the participants' particular meaning or importance they gave to SIPs and if they saw any form of change taking place in their school. I was interested in finding out if SIPs affected them in a personal, professional, or emotional way as they attempted to make change in their school. In other words, I wanted to acknowledge the teachers' and administrators' perspectives and the importance of the context of school improvement (Reezigt, 2001).

The second criterion of significance was *group resonance*. Similar to Hirschhorn's (2008) explanation of group resonance, this criterion of significance was based on determining if the participant responses were similar in nature, shared or common. Unlike Hirschhorn's explanation of group resonance where participants came together and data was examined that "provoked the most resonant reaction in the group" (p. 76), the participants were interviewed individually and did not come together as a

large group. In this study, similarities were drawn from the open codes assigned to the data and grouped under a focused code or category.

The third form of resonance I used as part of the criteria of significance in this study was *researcher resonance*. This form of resonance was based on how the experiences from both the teachers and administrators involved in this study resonated with me as the researcher and if these experiences caused me to think of similar ones from my work as a district administrator with school improvement planning. In other words, could I link what the participants were saying to my collective experiences with school improvement planning? And could these experiences link to the generation of a theory about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their schools? Researcher resonance as a criterion of significance fitted with the constructivist grounded theory methodology used in this study. As Charmaz (2006) notes, a constructivist grounded theory approach means “the focus is on a mutual construction of knowledge by the researcher and participant and the ability to develop subjective understandings of participants’ meanings” (p. 510).

Against this background, the data analysis framework I created used four phases of data analysis each with specific coding procedures and a criterion of significance. Figure 1 summarizes the data analysis framework used in this study. Each phase of data analysis will be discussed throughout this chapter. Figure 1 also reinforces the notion that constant comparative analysis happened simultaneously within and across each phase of data analysis. As noted earlier, this meant that as a researcher I was always returning to the data looking for confirmation of the same categories in new data while at the same time being aware of novel ones that were emerging.

Constant Comparative Analyses

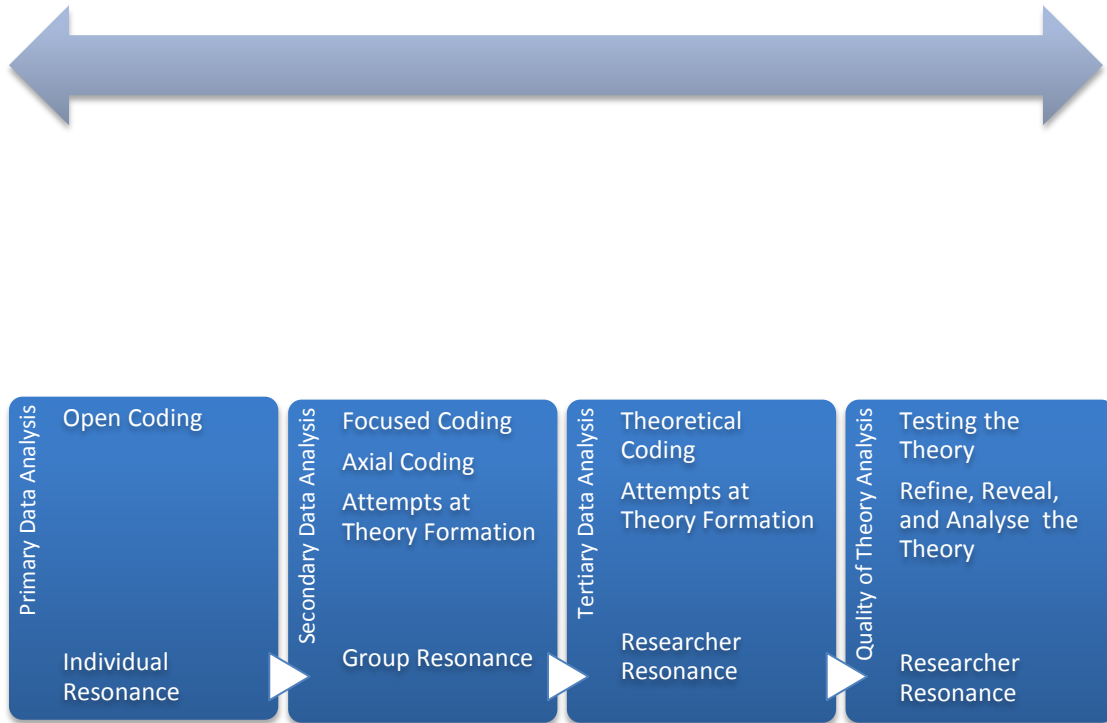


Figure 1. Data Analysis Framework

The first criterion of significance, individual resonance, and the findings from open coding as part of the primary data analysis phase of this study will be discussed next.

Primary Data Analysis

The data collection methods used in this study generated a plethora of data. I began, in hindsight, probably the hardest way, as I was eager to analyze the interviews I had with teachers and administrators. I had no idea how intense line-by-line coding was, how to write open codes, how to transform open codes to focused codes, how to use focused codes to create and discuss axial codes, how selective coding occurred, and most importantly how to generate a theory from all of these codes. In retrospect I am glad it happened this way because I had to figure out what these procedures meant to get

through each phase of data analysis and become confident and comfortable with grounded theory methodology.

The data collected from the interviews were voluminous. All interviews were transcribed and shortly thereafter coded line-by-line using open codes written in the form of a gerund. Gerunds are verbs that act as nouns. For example, the gerund form of “read” is “reading.” Charmaz (2006) advocates using this form of language to simplify coding. I was feeling confident about open coding and honoured the line-by-line, constant comparative expectation as outlined in the grounded theory methodology literature.

Getting Better at Coding

My first interview was approximately 30 minutes in length. After being transcribed there were 192 multiple line exchanges between the first participant and myself as the researcher. A multiple line exchange means one or more than one line by either what the researcher said (co-constructivist role) or what the participant shared. There was one line left blank between exchanges simply to arrange the transcript so it could be easily seen and then analyzed. Table 6 below shows an excerpt of an interview and is an example of several lines of transcript with accompanying open codes. Each response was numbered with the corresponding transcribed text. This excerpt shows one participant’s response (#128) that generated several lines of text (N = 26). To ensure line-by-line coding was completed, I highlighted the transcribed text in yellow. This excerpt shows that the majority of the lines of text (N = 22) were analyzed line-by-line to generate open codes. I then placed my open codes using gerunds along side the transcribed text. From the response below, 13 open codes were generated, each separated by a semi-colon.

Table 6. Excerpt of an interview with several lines of transcript with accompanying open codes

RESPONSE	TRANSCRIBED TEXT	OPEN CODES
128	<p>J: I think in order to keep the school improvement plan sort of alive, you have to discuss it. So it is always on our agenda every staff meeting, our monthly staff meeting. So we might, we won't take the whole thing but we might take a certain goal or a certain strategy and say you know focus on the strategy maybe of co-constructing criteria because we are working on self-assessment. And maybe share some examples and successes around co-constructing criteria. So I have the teachers, I think to keep it alive, practicing things in the classroom and then sharing that at staff meetings because we do learn from each other. So that way we're just focusing on a little bit each month. Now usually a couple of times a year where we might have a PD that is school-based, one of those PD day, we will take an hour and a half say, or two hours and just focus on "okay, we are at this time of the year, let's go through, look at our school improvement plan, what things can we say we have done and done well? And where do we think we need to go?" Now I usually start together and then branch off and usually it's like sometimes maybe K, one, two, three, four, five or it might just be a mix. I usually make the groups at times because you want people to go with people they don't actually work with because you get different conversations, right?</p>	<p>Keeping the SIP alive; Placing priority to discuss the SIP at every staff meeting; Focusing on ONLY part of the SIP; Focusing on a strategy; Sharing examples and successes; Keeping it alive by practicing it in the classrooms and sharing at staff meetings; Learning from one another; Selecting a focus each month to discuss; Using PD that is school based to focus on SIP; Reviewing the SIP; Monitoring what is working; Seeking input about where to improve; Having a whole group discussion to get different perspectives;</p>

To show the voluminous amount of data generated from each interview, a complete interview with transcribed highlighted text (line-by-line coding) and open codes generated from the primary data analysis phase is included in Appendix M.

During primary data analysis, the first four of the nine participant interviews were analyzed as shown above. The first three participants came from one school. I analyzed these interviews (N=9) because I was eager to hear about one school's perspective as opposed to analysing participant interviews across the three schools involved in the study. I also wanted to get comfortable with open coding and the constant comparative process. While many of the open codes were similar and recurring throughout each of the

three interviews, I was continuously applying new codes as the data analysis unfolded. The fourth participant came from the second school involved in the study. Each participant had three interviews.

Table 7 summarizes the results of four participants and their interviews (N=12). The purpose of this table is to show not only the voluminous amount of transcribed text that was coded line-by-line (N=1,876), but also the large amount of open codes generated by this process (N=742).

Table 7. Primary data analysis: First four interviews-descriptive analytics

School A				
Participant	Interview Reference	Number of Interviews	Number of Responses	Number of Open Codes
1	0015, 0021, 0023	3	516	211
2	0012, 0013, 0025	3	482	113
3	0010, 0020, 0022	3	435	216
TOTAL		9	1,433	540
School B				
Participant	Interview Reference	Number of Interviews	Number of Responses	Number of Open Codes
4	0027, 0028, 0029	3	443	202
TOTAL		3	443	202
School A and School B TOTAL		12	1,876	742

It was not until I completed the analysis of the interviews (N=3) from the fourth participant in a different school that I realized that I needed to make the coding process more efficient given the massive number of open codes generated (N=742). Although many of the open codes were similar in nature I needed a more efficient way of coding the remaining interviews.

At some point during this journey, I scribbled on the back of an old business card two questions: *What is happening in the data?* and *What does it mean?* (Charmaz, 2006), and stuck it on the bottom right corner of my computer monitor. I looked at these questions time and again, but failed to respond to them in some meaningful way until one day I attempted to try to make sense of all the data I collected. What happened was the process of extending the open codes I created to focused codes and the secondary analysis of the data began.

Secondary Data Analysis

The objective I had for the secondary data analysis phase of this study was to find a way to make the data analysis of the remaining interviews (N=15) more manageable and less time consuming. I needed a more efficient way of coding the data given the voluminous amount of transcribed text and the results of the number of open codes that emerged after the line-by-line analysis of the interviews from the first four participants was completed (N=742). Attaining this objective would reduce the large amount of open codes to allow the data analysis of the remaining interviews to move along at a faster rate.

I returned to the data and each open code and asked myself *What was happening in the data?* and *What did it mean?* (Charmaz, 2006). I then assigned a focused code to each open code. Charmaz (2006) defines focused coding:

Focused coding is the second major phase in coding. Focused coding means using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data. Focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytical sense to categorize your data incisively and completely. (p. 57)

The focused code was in the form of one word and often included a few more words that were added that I thought could shed some light on the properties and dimensions of the focused codes.

Classification, Categorization, Properties, Dimensions

Classifying similar and differing concepts using focused codes allowed me to explore my understanding of the themes that emerged from the data. The process of grouping classifications (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) after continuously comparing data led to making several categories characteristic of one or several focused codes. After I identified important categories, properties, and dimensions of that category were drawn from the data by answering questions such as “what are the characteristics of items that fit that categorization? Or, what attributes are specific to this one concept?” (p. 123).

Properties comment on descriptive questions. *Dimensions* “answer questions about the variance of such properties” (Rich, 2012, p. 5). An example of a dimension might be the “extent of use,” whereas a property might simply be “use.” In short, “dimensions measure whereas properties describe” (Rich, 2012, p. 5). Specifying the properties and dimensions of a category is known as *axial coding*. Glaser and Strauss (1967) view axial coding as “building a dense texture of relationships around the ‘axis’ of a category” (p. 64).

Proponents indicate that axial coding can strengthen the analysis of a category. Other methodologists caution that axial coding “may limit what and how researchers learn about their studied worlds and, thus, restricts the codes they construct” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 62). For this research, I followed Charmaz’s (2006) premise to allow emergent themes to appear without the strict use of traditional grounded theory frameworks.

To illustrate these terms further, Table 8 shows an example of a focused code I used to capture multiple open codes. This example shows that I used the focused code *agency* to show that teachers had the capacity to act independently, but I also wanted to code (axial) the variations within this category—in other words, its *properties*. In this case, I added *assigning responsibility for strategies in the school improvement plan* to describe the similarities. Looking closer, the *dimensions* of this focused code show the variance of responsibility ranging from *shared* (implementing the strategies in the SIP is a *shared* responsibility; identifying the responsibility for what is in the school improvement plan lies with *all* teachers; placing ownership of the responsibilities to *all*) to *individual* (knowing *my* role; knowing *my* responsibility; primary responsibility for teacher professional goals principal).

Table 8. Focused code from multiple open codes

FOCUSED CODE	OPEN CODES
Agency – assigning responsibility for strategies in the SIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• implementing the strategies in the SIP is a shared responsibility <li>• assigning responsibility to a strategy to see if it was implemented <li>• knowing my role <li>• knowing my responsibility <li>• placing ownership of the responsibilities to all teachers <li>• seeking information to see if there is an identified lead <li>• identifying the responsibility for what is in the school improvement plan lies with all teachers <li>• primary responsibility for teacher professional goals principal <li>• sharing responsibility with other staff for other staff

- confirming responsibility of the plan is the teachers

During the secondary data analysis process of returning to the data and extending open codes to focused codes I reduced the number of open codes (N=742) from the first four participant interviews (N=12) to a more manageable number of focused codes (N=96) by using the second criterion of significance, *group resonance* (participant responses or teacher experiences that were common among participants). As noted by Charmaz (2006) earlier, “focused coding requires decisions about initial codes which make the most analytical sense to categorize your data incisively and completely” (p. 57).

Although the 96 focused codes were still large in number, the application of the second criterion of significance, *group resonance*, revealed numerous similarities. I assigned *agency* to all of the open codes that had something to do with the actions taken by teachers or administrators when working with the SIP. The data showed that *agency* had numerous variations (N=33). For example, *agency* was used repeatedly as a focused code but with differences (N=33). Table 9 shows these variations.

Table 9. Focused code with properties (axial code)

2.00	Agency
2.01	Agency-accountability
2.02	Agency-aligning goals
2.03	Agency-alignment of goals (teacher professional growth goals with SIP)
2.04	Agency-assigning responsibility for strategies in the SIP
2.05	Agency-creating the SIP
2.06	Agency-defining roles
2.07	Agency-determining focus
2.08	Agency-determining focus/foci
2.09	Agency-determining PD needs
2.10	Agency-discussing improvement strategies
2.11	Agency-discussing SIP

2.12	Agency-discussion-decision making
2.13	Agency-engagement-seeking input
2.14	Agency-engagement-using committee structure
2.15	Agency-focus discussion on goals
2.16	Agency-focused discussions-making decision
2.17	Agency-goals aligned with school vision, school mission
2.18	Agency-implementation
2.19	Agency-making decisions
2.20	Agency-no exposure
2.21	Agency-purpose-confirming actions contained in SIP
2.22	Agency-purpose-school educational review
2.23	Agency-purpose-teacher evaluation
2.24	Agency-reviewing purpose
2.25	Agency-setting goals
2.26	Agency-sharing
2.27	Agency-sharing information
2.28	Agency-SIP discussed frequently
2.29	Agency-student responsibility
2.30	Agency-teacher responsibility
2.31	Agency-timelines
2.32	Agency-using experience from previous SIP
2.33	Agency-using school leadership to learn

Similar to the focused code *agency*, other focused codes that were used repeatedly throughout the secondary analysis phase of this study revealed variations within each of them as well. A complete list of these variations is included in Appendix N. Table 10 captures the results of both primary and secondary data analyses using two criteria of significance. It shows how a large number of open codes generated from primary data analysis that analyzed the data line-by-line, using constant comparative analysis, and individual resonance as a criterion of significance generated a large number of open codes. It includes the number of variations of similar codes acquired during secondary data analysis using group resonance as a criterion of significance that lead to the generation of 15 focused codes or categories.

Table 10. Focused codes, properties, and assigned open codes

FOCUSED CODES	PROPERTIES	OPEN CODES
1 Accountability	1	91
2 Agency	34	134
3 Conflict	1	6
4 Context	26	281
5 Engagement	1	1
6 Expectations	5	28
7 Focus	1	1
8 Having issues with SIP process	1	58
9 Monitoring	5	37
10 Narrative	8	49
11 Networking	5	20
12 Power	4	14
13 Recognizing differences	1	3
14 Seeking engagement	1	6
15 Using data	2	13
TOTAL	96	742

This table is significant for a few reasons. First, it demonstrates how a large number of open codes can be reduced to a more manageable number (n=15) by applying two criteria of significance to make decisions about the data. Second, it demonstrates a constructivist approach that shows how the categories were constructed from the open codes that were grounded in data, as opposed to fitting the data into predetermined categories. This is consistent with constructivist grounded theory methodology research. Third, as Hirschkorn (2008) noted in his study, “Not everything that emerged in this research was equally represented, nor has equal value to the

participants” (p. 65), but rather it represented “the amount of focus the participants directed toward each category” (p. 76). Certainly, both the number of open codes and the variations within the focused codes demonstrated Hirschkorn’s conclusion. And finally, to expedite the data analysis process for the remaining five participant interviews (N=15), the grounded theory methodology accomplished what it advocated by reducing the number of open codes to fifteen focused codes or categories. This is significant because the analysis of the remaining interviews needed to be more manageable to allow me to either confirm data saturation or as a means to reveal new categories. The details of the focused codes or categories above will be explained next so they can later be juxtaposed with the findings of the remaining interviews. What follows are the details of each category followed by a summary using a table to highlight the properties within each focused code.

Accountability and Focus

A common category that emerged in the data was accountability. This category was layered with various properties and dimensions. The first property within accountability was focus. Most participants equated the school improvement plan with focus and identified it as means of being accountable. One dimension of accountability revealed that a few participants viewed the SIP as an “imposed form of accountability,” meaning that there was an expectation of the school to fulfill what the district wanted to accomplish and therefore the focus of the SIP was predetermined. For example, several participants felt that improvement efforts in the areas of literacy and numeracy were imposed on them. However, most participants were less concerned about having autonomy of the SIP and embraced it as a form of accountability and a means to “keep us

focused.” Participants affirmed that the “SIP provides direction to what goes on in the school.” They felt that “planning keeps a focus for everybody and provides a direction of where we are going and where we want to go.” They saw the SIP as a way to know “what to focus on, what the teacher is aiming for, what the teacher is driving for.”

Others noted, “Planning provides an end and everything that teachers do to work towards that end.” Comments like “connecting the end with the mission and vision components of the SIP” or “aligning everything in the SIP with the mission and the vision of the plan” and “affirming that achieving the end is achieving the mission and the vision of the SIP” surfaced. Another response acknowledged “the importance of returning to the mission and vision of the school” as the focus of “what teachers, teams, and students do in school” by “knowing where they need to move their students to, where the teachers want to be in their capacity as a teacher.”

Another property within the accountability category extended focus to goal setting. Several participants viewed the SIP as a mechanism “to keep the team focused and targeted on the work they do” by “using a common goal, e.g. personalization of each child and their learning as the focus of teacher discussions.” Participants recognized the importance of ensuring the goal is implemented in the context of reading and math processes referring to flexible math groups and guided reading groups. Establishing improvement goals for students was the “focus of everything teachers do with students” to “meet their needs” and “knowing which level the student was working at and teaching to their individual needs.” Being accountable “for students by showing where the children are and where they made their gains” was common throughout many participant responses. Some teachers revealed that they “monitor student goals by

having them take ownership of them,” “asking if student goals are met,” and determining “if goals were realized.” Still others “engaged students in tasks that lead toward determining if their goals were met” by “having a central topic that students explore throughout their entire time spent in school” by “assigning in-depth topics to students” so they “become an expert in something.” Other responses about being accountable through goal setting extended beyond the school context to the next grade levels. These included “keeping track of students as they leave elementary and move to the middle school” by “monitoring student achievement” and “keeping track of student success beyond student achievement” by “monitoring student involvement in extracurricular activities and volunteer work.”

In addition, being accountable by being “responsible to other teachers for their students’ learning” emerged as a property of accountability. Many felt that the SIP fostered an “interdependence” among staff. They felt the SIP “allows teachers to work together” and “allows us to be more than individual teachers working in individual classrooms.” “Creating an interdependence among staff,” “being accountable as a group of teachers for several groups of children,” “to everyone on the team,” “for ensuring that students are learning,” “empowering teachers to share knowledge,” and “for teachers to teach other professionals” were some of the responses shared by many teachers. This notion of teacher interdependence as a form of accountability was embraced as something “positive and shared among all teachers.”

Another property of the accountability category centered on determining if the SIP made a difference. One participant noted “the strategies in the SIP lead to an increase in student achievement,” while another boasted that by “buying into the value and the

purpose of the SIP we avoid being all over the place.” Another participant response acknowledged the SIP as “a best practice because it captures where the school is going, what is the end, what are the goals of the SIP and what needs to be accomplished.” Another participant was very clear to articulate the changes resulting from the SIP by listing four results that took place in the school. These included “personalization of learning, character development, mindfulness, and learning in depth.”

Table 11. Summary of focused code and properties: Accountability

FOCUSED CODES	PROPERTIES
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus • goal setting • monitoring student achievement and extra-curricular activities • interdependence amongst teachers • changes resulting from using the SIP

Agency, Engagement, and Seeking Engagement

I assigned *agency* to any action that participants took as a result of using the SIP in their work in schools. Within the 15 focused codes, *agency*, *engagement*, and *seeking engagement* all surfaced with assigned open codes to each category, the greatest of which was *agency* (N=134). Although the data showed only one open code assigned to *engagement* and six open codes assigned to *seeking engagement*, I chose to merge them for discussion purposes.

Similar to the previous category, *agency* was multi-layered and contained numerous properties. The first property of *agency* was synonymous with the previous category, *accountability*, but had more to do with teachers and administrators identifying specific actions that lead them to being accountable. These actions included collecting

data, administering pre and post assessments, charting results, showing gains in student achievement, reviewing the data, using the data to decide next steps, having discussions about data, warehousing data, working together, sharing responsibilities, using personalized learning journals, recording personal learning goals, expecting students to create one academic and one personal goal, expecting students to accomplish their goals, reviewing goals, creating new goals, and monitoring goals to see if they were met.

There were numerous comments about goal setting and these centered on the expectation of aligning teacher professional growth goals with those contained in the SIP and in the district improvement plan. Many participant responses agreed that pursuing a “change in practice” with the “expectation that one teacher personal professional growth goal align itself with one of the SIP goals” was reasonable. One participant noted that “expecting alignment of goals shows that you’re thinking about and incorporating that into your teaching.” However, other participant perspectives surfaced as well. “Linking teacher professional goals to the SIP goals to district improvement goals” and “dealing with the pressures from school and/or district office to align personal professional goals with the SIP” was problematic. One participant questioned the “expectation that personal, professional goals fit with the school plan” and the “shift of how personal professional goals have moved from personal and professional to how they fit into the SIP or having a connection to district goals” is a cause for concern. Nonetheless, participant responses were unanimous in their acknowledgement of the importance of “knowing how to achieve a goal and how to measure it.”

Another property of agency was the role of the teacher and assigning responsibility for the strategies contained in the SIP. Generally, participant responses

recognized that “implementing the strategies in the SIP is a shared responsibility” and “placing ownership of the responsibilities to all teachers.” One teacher succinctly noted: “identifying the responsibility for what is in the school improvement plan lies with all teachers” and “knowing my role and knowing my responsibility within the SIP is up to me.” One participant noted the responsibility of monitoring the SIP and “assigning responsibility to a strategy to see if it was implemented” while another commented about “seeking information to see if there is an identified lead” for each of the activities contained in the SIP.

Other actions characteristic of agency as a category were those around creating the SIP itself. The range of actions included defining roles, determining focus, determining professional development needs, discussing improvement strategies, seeking input, using a committee structure, focused discussions on goals and making decisions, aligning goals with the school vision and mission, actions relating to the implementation of the strategies within the SIP, using the SIP to action recommendations from the school review process or those linked to teacher evaluations, setting goals, sharing information, monitoring the SIP, examining student and teacher responsibilities, reviewing timelines and using school leadership to learn. In a similar fashion, there were several actions revealed relating to the process of creating the SIP. These included “working backwards from standards” and “pulling apart the SIP by using common themes and linking goals to common themes.” Defining roles to create the SIP was revealed with important actions like “assigning a chair to collect agenda items for discussion and to facilitate the meeting and to keep the meeting focused” as well as “having a secretary to record the discussion,” and “having a timekeeper to keep the meetings flowing.” Additionally, determining the

focus of the SIP emerged as a specific action participants were engaged in. These actions ranged from “reflecting on what needs to improve,” to “determining the number of focus areas e.g. reading, writing, and math” while also “maintaining other school wide foci.”

Another action relating to the process of creating the SIP were those that engaged staff in discussions and decision-making about finding and selecting which improvement strategies to include in the SIP. Finding improvement strategies revealed a few sources that included strategies from professional development/training sessions, discussions and ideas generated at staff meetings, those identified in the school educational review process, research-based strategies from articles and professional readings, or from information shared in graduate courses that teachers were taking. Teachers and administrators alike agreed that integrating strategies that have shown results elsewhere, “like teachers marking one another’s student samples of writing to improve overall achievement in writing,” was an example of a strategy that would be included in the SIP. One teacher commented that more success would be reached if we “avoided making teachers feel they have to do it.” Instead, “teachers need to be given time and opportunities to reflect on which strategies should be contained in the SIP according to their comfort level and familiarity with the strategy.” Opportunities to “meet as a group of teachers to discuss improvement strategies”, or “bringing the SIP to staff meetings to discuss improvement strategies” were suggested effective actions that “keep the SIP alive.” Similarly, “using the SIP to analyze a goal” and “discussing school goals on a regular basis” were echoed by other participants. One school used a committee structure to decide the wording that goes into the SIP. This school established various committees

using representatives by level from all staff and other specialists including the resource and methods teacher, guidance, and administration to form a SIP committee.

Actions relating to the implementation of the SIP were revealed in the data as well. Teachers taking on leadership roles to implement the strategies contained in the SIP was common. Administrators encouraged staff to use the strategies within the SIP by asking questions and seeking information about how they are dealing with the strategies in their classrooms. Most teachers use the strategies in the SIP and were committed to implementing particular strategies to improve a curricular area.

Administrators used the SIP for various purposes as well. They used the SIP to discuss with teachers whether or not the “indicators of success” contained in the SIP were being realized. In addition, some principals used the SIP as part of the teacher evaluation process as well as a source of information to explain to new staff members what the school was working on. One administrator selected professional readings about the teaching learning process that were aligned with the SIP goals and incorporated them into staff meetings. Acknowledging that the SIP was well known by staff, another administrator commented that the SIP “has evolved in to a practice that is used on a regular basis.” This administrator pointed out that the “SIP is used so frequently that it would be on a rare occasion if it was not discussed.”

Table 12. Summary of focused code and properties: Agency

FOCUSED CODES	PROPERTIES
Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • actions relating to using the SIP e.g. collecting data, charting results, etc. • goal setting • assigning responsibility for strategies contained in the SIP • implementing the strategies in the SIP • monitoring the implementation of the SIP • actions relating to the creation of the SIP e.g. discussing improvement strategies, determining professional development needs, etc.

Disconnectedness: Conflict, Having Issues with the SIP, and Power

At various times throughout the data collection process I coded several lines of participant responses that revealed a concern or issue with the SIP. Originally organized as three separate focused codes (conflict, having issues with the SIP, and power), I decided to discuss them together simply because of the similarities or properties common throughout the codes. Collectively they represent *disconnectedness* between teachers and administrators within the school and district office specifically.

Many participants acknowledged the lack of support from district office for teachers. There was a cynicism about “district office people” and numerous suggestions about what they need to do. “Not knowing what gets done with the SIP or if they are ever looked at it beyond the school” or “doing planning and paperwork for the sake of doing it” were compelling comments that reflected such sentiments. Principals acknowledged that “the agenda for their meetings (principal) comes from above” and did not feel part of the system or supported by their Superintendent. They recognized that “just completing

paperwork does not equate to results” and needed opportunities to collaborate and have principal focused agendas.

Another issue pointed out by both teachers and administrators was how the current SIP process, as mandated by district office, did not recognize different cohorts of students. There were several comments that the SIP should be designed accordingly around student cohorts. Specifically, participants recognized the difficulty with setting improvement objectives for the whole school as opposed to identifying targets for the different cohorts of students by grade. They wanted to have the autonomy to make fair comparisons between cohorts of students and assessment results.

Another concern with the SIP related to changing expectations of the SIP especially in relation to the duration of the plan. Participants revealed that plans ranged from one, three, or five years. Here they questioned the function of the plan and disagreed with district and provincial expectation relating to the timelines of the plan. Instead, most teachers and administrators agreed that a one-year plan sufficed given the uncertainty of staff allocations, political agendas, or the “latest and greatest” fix from the district or the province.

One principal preferred a “work plan [that] works best for the teachers at the school” because the “ownership of the strategies within the SIP lies with the District,” but “filling out the form to keep them happy” worked. Another principal acknowledged that “the school’s goals are not as important but personal goals are more important” to get teachers to “buy in to improvement.” With competing agendas between district office and the department, one participant believed “that we don’t give enough time to see change” especially if you are “not being treated as a

professional.” This participant doubted “if teachers can stick to a plan because they are so busy with the day-to-day realities of teaching.”

Other points of dissension from teachers ranged from feelings “that administrators should not be part of team meetings so they can have greater ownership of improvement strategies” to feeling “the SIP is too broad and staffs lack discipline to stick to a plan let alone a 10 year plan or even a four year plan.” Discontent with the SIP ranged from comments like “expecting the school to be accountable to the district” or “feeling that the principal thought it was important and could fix it” to teachers “not knowing what the goals of the SIP are or what is contained in the SIP” also surfaced. A few teachers felt they had “bigger concerns about how to serve kids” and “have higher priorities than what the school or district impose.” They felt that “keeping the needs of their students as the central focus” was their priority and that “teachers are more aware of what they need to deal with as compared to what is in the SIP.”

One teacher questioned the ownership of the strategies in the SIP and nowhere in their SIP were individual teacher improvement needs ever addressed even if teacher professional growth goals were aligned with improvement goals contained in the SIP. For this reason, this participant did not use the SIP and noted that the principal of the school failed to recognize that “teachers are so busy.” This participant claimed that “the SIP is not used on a consistent basis and only used when it is suggested as an agenda item by the school district.” He concluded: “Using the SIP is not intrinsic.” There is a difference in “recognizing the importance of doing something versus having something pushed on you.” This participant saw the principal approach as “top down” and the SIP as a means

of forcing teachers to “select goals according to the SIP template from the district and the need to fit personal, professional goals with the SIP goals.”

Doubts about if the SIP was working also came to light. One participant sensed a “shift from school based improvement to district imposed improvement” and how “more time was spent on creating the plan than doing it.” The participant stated that “I don’t use SIPs” and “that the SIP in recent years is not working.” What gets done with the plans seemed nebulous to one participant: “Plans are placed on the portal but I don’t know what if anything gets done with them.” Another participant commented that “the SIP is an exercise” and “wanting change right away but not giving adequate time to allow change to happen makes no sense.”

The exercise of power between district office and all the schools involved in the study emerged in the data. One teacher felt that district office was “holding teachers accountable as a school.” A principal commented that a person from district office stated, “this is our district plan, how is the school following our district plan?” Teachers and administrators felt “being caught” between what the school wanted to do and what district office expected.” They questioned the “ownership of the strategies” particularly those imposed on the school and how it influenced teacher involvement and buy-in to the SIP. Feeling the district was “driving the agenda” rather than the school, the interview data revealed the omnipresence of the continuous influence of district office. Teachers and administrators felt that school improvement planning was “moving away from a principal-teacher SIP to a district imposed SIP.” One administrator desired the “need to be empowered to discuss items pertinent to their needs, not the needs of district office.”

Expectations from district office were made explicit through the interview process by both teachers and administrators. These included using committees to determine what was contained in the SIP, implementing the goals of the SIP in classrooms, alignment of teacher professional growth goals with school and district improvement goals, and discussing the SIP on a regular basis. Finally, principals commented that they were “expected to see strategies contained in the SIP being consistently implemented in the classroom and within student learning.”

Table 13. Summary of focused code and properties: Disconnectedness

FOCUSED CODES	PROPERTIES
Disconnectedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of support from district office • completing the SIP for the sake of completion; no feedback; not knowing what gets done with the SIP • imposition of content into SIP from above as opposed to ideas from within the school • quality of the SIP compromised as a result of not acknowledging cohorts of students • confusion about the duration of the plan • the need to appease district office • SIP too broad; keep the needs of the students as the focus • questions about the ownership of the strategies within the SIP • questions about the need to align goals • doubts about if SIP works • concerns about the shift of the SIP from school based improvement to district based improvement • need to have change occur right away as opposed to giving adequate time to allow change to happen

-
- district office holding teachers accountable; being caught between what the school wants to do and what district office expects
 - district office driving the agenda rather than schools

Context

There were numerous open codes (N=281) categorized using the focused code *context*. Throughout the coding process these focused codes were used to describe the school culture (context). As stated earlier, I wanted to capture the participants' particular meaning or importance they gave to SIPs and if they saw any form of change taking place in their school. I was interested in finding out if SIPs affected them in a personal, professional, or emotional way as they attempted to make change in their school.

There was widespread acknowledgment that the context of education is always changing. Despite teachers and administrators establishing consistent vision and mission statements and challenging themselves by asking where they can go from here, there was a common sentiment that education was always changing, that there was always something new and different even if the change was “with a new slant” or “repackaged with a new name.” This resulted in a “feeling there is too much” and “we are changing too often” or “getting tired of the plan by saying ‘we did some of that.’” One teacher pointed out that “we are used to jumping through the hoops” referring to the longevity of an initiative until something new comes along and replaces it. While they recognize that the pendulum in education is always swinging, teachers often “feel guilty if they throw it out” referring to replacing one approach or program with another. There is recognition that the SIP continues to change as a result of changes in staff and administration, changes in district and provincial directions, and changes in political

agendas. In fact, one teacher commented, “There is no other job other than teaching that has to deal with so much change.”

As such, there was a desire for teachers and administrators alike to keep the SIP “realistic” and the “focus consistent.” Participants acknowledged the urgency to identify student needs first and the “the direction of the SIP needs to come from the needs of the students and the staff” as opposed to district or provincial bureaucracies. There were strong desires to keep the SIP “realistic” and “avoiding setting improvement too high” with a “focus on what can be done.” “Keeping the SIP alive by focusing on a strategy” prevailed as the way forward to make changes in school. One principal commented, “If you don’t let them decide on what to improve, you don’t get any buy in and it’s just me spouting off” – referring to why it is so important to have teacher involvement in the creation of the goals and strategies in the SIP. One teacher stated that “the strategies need to be real, they need to be trench basic,” referring to teachers being “in the trenches face-to-face with students” as opposed to others like administrators, district office personnel, provincial ministry staff, and politicians “who are far removed from the classrooms.” One administrator noted, “If we are ever to improve in this province, we need to stick with the plan.”

Using a common need to create a focus for the SIP was one school’s solution for making meaningful improvement. In this school, linking the strategies in the SIP with students taking ownership for their learning was the focus. Strategies included students doing self-assessments to understand how they are learning and teachers using more descriptive feedback, instead of grades or marks only, to help kids understand their learning. The expectation was that students would self-evaluate their learning all the

time and, through teacher conferencing, they would set individual improvement goals. This school set the focus of the SIP to help students by showing them how to take ownership for their learning.

The data showed the role of principals, and their interplay with the SIP was congruent with change taking place in the school. One principal began with “all teachers sharing their professional growth goals within the team.” Teachers were allowed to keep one personal growth goal separate from the SIP while the other two had to connect with the goals of the SIP, usually in the areas of literacy and numeracy. The SIP goals were decided collaboratively at staff meetings and the principal encouraged “starting with something positive.” In addition, the principal helped staff “make sense of how to improve student results,” especially in the area of literacy, and “avoid being locked into something that is not working” like “being locked into timelines or new initiatives imposed by district office.” The data showed that one of the most talked about principal roles was “placing priority to discuss the SIP at every staff meeting” and “keeping the SIP ‘fresh in their minds’ by discussing it on a consistent basis at staff meetings, professional development sessions to look at strategies, in professional learning community meetings and grade level meetings.” One teacher recognized the leadership of the principal “using break out group format to discuss the SIP” while keeping the vision and mission of the SIP at the forefront of discussions.

The data showed that the context for school improvement planning was affected by outside influences. Exploring new strategies to include in the SIP from teacher and administrator professional development was continuous and the pressure to adopt programs was at the forefront of meetings with district office or provincial personnel.

One principal questioned “the sustainability of outside improvement programs” and doubted “whether to place in the SIP or not.” The data revealed numerous comments about the context of education in New Brunswick. “Add-ons” was the term used to describe programs and pedagogy that continue to be imposed on schools that either do not want them or are not ready for them. As one teacher commented “this results in losing the focus of the SIP” and “everything in the SIP often does not get implemented because of time or other things that get in the way.”

Another outside influence affecting the context of the SIP was the district improvement plan (DIP). Teachers and administrators pointed out that “the DIP is created first” and that “the DIP is top down.” One administrator challenged “if the DIP works” and “while schools are expected to align goals, does district office align services and supports to schools to help them achieve their goals?”

One school acknowledged that “some improvement strategies are not in the SIP” at first and often do not “make their way into the SIP.” Add-ons to making improvements in the school like the ELF (Early Literacy Friends) program for parents of early years children do not “always get into the plan” but teachers are expected to implement it. In one instance, a principal commented that “investigating ways to improve student achievement are often explored first before ever making their way into to the SIP.” Another participant acknowledged “that some of the improvement strategies come from within or are adopted from outside influences” while another recognized “that connections to the SIP are not planned but rather by chance.” In this instance the participant noted that “the SIP is not pulled out but the strategies are known and discussed.” Against this background, teachers in this school knew “the areas to focus on”

and on a consistent basis asked if what they were doing was working. The context here was the desire to “avoid changing direction too often but fine tuning the plan periodically” and “keeping the SIP plans consistent and adding components as needed, as required, and as agreed upon.”

Principals are key figures in the context of any school. The role of the principal and their involvement in school improvement planning emerged in the data. The data showed that familiarizing the staff with the vision and mission of the SIP was a key role of the principal. As important was maintaining the focus on the vision and mission of the SIP for staff. One principal indicated that “by using their personal and professional experience to empower others and bring out their talents of the staff” was their primary role. This principal felt that “teachers don’t always see their strengths and that sometimes an administrator’s responsibility is to bring those talents out.” In other words, empower teachers – “Give it a try... and push yourself.” Another principal used a focused question when meeting with every teacher to discuss personal professional growth goals and how they align with the school improvement goals: “Talk about what they see where they need to grow professionally” and discuss with teachers individually ways to support them in order to “bring about change.” Fostering an atmosphere of goal setting on a regular basis both by the teachers and as a student expectation was the context of school improvement described by another principal: “Establishing new goals after initial goals are completed, revising goals on a regular basis, connecting goals to new initiatives, and linking existing goals to new initiatives.” This principal felt that reviewing teacher professional goals throughout the school year at least twice was a good practice - “Let’s look back at your goals, were you able to accomplish what you set out to do? So how, if

not why do you think that didn't happen? And what do you see for the future for next year going forward?" This principal felt that knowing your responsibility as a principal in terms of how to support teacher growth resulted in teachers "teaching to their strengths" and "pushed them to think outside the box." Ultimately teachers and administrators need to "know each other's strengths."

Another principal discussed that their job was "to be realistic as to what goes in the SIP" and "avoiding wasting teacher's time." Still another pointed out that their role was "to support teachers and their teaching through the SIP" and "examine what teachers are doing despite changes in provincial assessments." One principal concluded that their role was "to decide what makes sense and what works" and keep in mind the purpose of the SIP: "know where students are at and move them to where they want them to be."

Valuing the positive impacts of the SIP was another characteristic that emerged from the data. One principal acknowledged that this was not always the case. "We wrote the SIP for the sake of writing it" and "no one worked together." In recent years, there has been widespread value for "what the SIP has done for teachers." As one principal noted, "while the focus is on student achievement, using the SIP to gain another perspective on ways of looking at things e.g. differentiation, benefits both students and teachers." Teachers also saw the strategies in the SIP as valuable and creating improvement goals as a team avoided teachers working in isolation. One teacher commented that by "looking at where everything we do is about student achievement and helping kids to learn; what do we need to do as a grade two team to make that happen?" Using a common goal approach with teams has changed the team dynamic. "Discussing not just individual students in a particular class but all students at a certain grade level

and having discussions at grade level or team meeting holds each other accountable.”

Another teacher spoke about “the strength of grade level meetings as a structure in place to work with the SIP” as a strength. Implementing improvement strategies and then coming back to the team to discuss how it worked was seen by many teachers as a form of positive change that impacted the context of the school. Collaborating on different resources to help students was also seen as a positive outcome amongst teachers.

In one particular school, being accountable for the SIP was part of the school context. Using instructional strategies with timelines to make improvements, teachers and principals fostering empowerment, asking key questions about strategies and what got done with them, monitoring strategies, asking questions about the effectiveness of strategies, monitoring timelines, seeking information about whether or not the use of the SIP lead to making change in the school, looking at team teaching to see if it would impact student achievement, looking at flexible grouping as part of the SIP, seeing growth and academic gains in student achievement, wanting to see more teaming in planning, and creating flexible groupings were all identified as characteristics of the school context originating from the use of the SIP. Conversely, in another school, trying something new for a short time without having the knowledge or experience to maintain success negatively affected the school context. Being unable to sustain improvement strategies, as structures were not in place, adversely affected change. As one teacher commented, “changing teacher assignments affects buy-in of improvement strategies as well as the implementation.”

Experiencing success emerged in the data in relation to the context of school improvement planning. The notion of being success oriented by showing student growth

in achievement using assessments and teaching to student needs was at the forefront of many conversations. In particular, “using the SIP to change responsibility (shared), planning (reducing the amount), workload (reducing the amount), and instruction (similar levels)” was a revealing comment made by one teacher. What this meant was by using flexible groupings to teach more homogeneous students rather than trying to meet all the diverse needs of students resulted in “teaching and meeting more students at their academic level.” As one teacher pointed out “changing instructional practice when you have fewer student needs to deal with is possible.”

The data showed that believing in the SIP was congruent with the need for buying in to the SIP. One teacher noted that “by believing there are changes that result from the SIP and committing to what the SIP contains and giving it time to work to see if there is an impact on student achievement is empowering teachers.” Another teacher commented that believing in the SIP happens when teachers “have a voice in creating the plan” and “linking it to what teachers do in classrooms is buying into the SIP.” Most teachers stressed that they need to be part of the SIP process and recognized their influence to “make the SIP come alive.” Having ownership of the strategies contained in the SIP with the responsibility for their implementation reinforced the importance of buy-in. Another teacher equated the importance of buy-in with “unity and ownership within the team” referring to having common goals with the “belief its going to work.” Having buy-in allows us “to push one another.”

But not all school contexts have buy-in for the SIP. Teachers and administrators alike emphasized the “need for further encouragement” for some staff and the need to address those that are not supporting school improvement efforts. One principal felt there

were a number of ways to deal with this. “Teachers need the research behind the strategies” or “using peer coaching to support each other” or “seeking information about the responsibility for the strategies in the SIP and if this responsibility is shared” were all ways to enhance buy-in of the SIP. However, despite best efforts, sometimes not all staff support school improvement efforts. Another principal pointed to the need for “moving along even with those not buying in.”

Nonetheless, the need for “buying-in to the SIP” stood out in the data as being an important part of the context for school improvement planning. Principals commented that they needed to make sense of the link between ownership and buy-in of the SIP. One principal acknowledged that “having greater ownership of the strategies within the SIP would lead to teachers using the plan more.” Principals felt “having buy-in equates to seeing strategies being implemented.” Another principal appealed to wanting to know “more about how to get buy-in from the adult learner (teachers).”

Principals valuing the teacher’s role were coded as part of the context of school improvement as well. This was in recognition that “that teachers are ‘in the trenches’ and are following through with efforts to make the school a better place.” One principal felt that “seeking input from teachers and following teacher leads, shape the plan.” Recognizing that “the needs of the staff change and knowing that staff is always changing not to mention the need to support new teachers”, seeking teacher input continuously is a reality of the context of school improvement planning. “Identifying areas teachers want to grow and teachers seeing what works and making it their own” reflect the value teachers have with the SIP.

Another principal valued his teachers as leaders that helped influence the context of the school. “Valuing natural leaders in the school” and “using team members to create a core leadership team” and “knowing there are teachers that can push themselves and others too” reflected the principal knowing the talents of the staff in one school. This principal created a context that empowered teachers to lead professional development by “using their teacher talents to build teacher capacity.” Sharing teacher knowledge and expertise encouraged teachers “to step up to help each other learn” by creating a learning environment for teachers to be open to new ideas. Wanting to move forward with change “means being flexible with what’s in the plan and letting teachers take the direction.” One principal commented that “autonomy is important to teachers” and the context of school improvement needs to be open and “allow teachers to have more say.” Teachers need to have “a personal connection to the goal” and administrators need to “value the importance of teachers wanting to try something different to make a change in student achievement.” One administrator concluded that “the goal will not be taken seriously if there is no autonomy.”

Finally, all administrators and teachers felt that the current context for school improvement is maximized through attention given to the SIP during professional development days and by utilizing team meetings to make decisions about where teachers need to go next with their students.

Table 14. Summary of focused code and properties: Context

FOCUSED CODES	PROPERTIES
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • always changing • feeling there is too much • need to keep the SIP focused and consistent • direction of the SIP needs to come from the needs of the students and staff • need to keep the SIP alive by focusing on a strategy; focus comes from a common need • importance of teacher involvement in the creations of goals and strategies contained in the SIP • need to stick to a plan; avoid changing direction • shared ownership for learning as a focus of the SIP • need to discuss the SIP on a consistent basis • SIP is affected by outside influences • pressure on the school to adopt new programs • influence of the district improvement plan on the school improvement plan • not everything is included in the SIP • some connections to the SIP are not planned but occur by chance • principals and teachers influence the context of the school and their involvement in the SIP is critical • experience with the SIP plan empowers others to bring out their individual talents • fostering an atmosphere of goal setting • monitoring success and problem solving challenges • supporting teacher growth; building teacher capacity • the SIP avoids teachers working in isolation • focus on student achievement

-
- use of grade level meetings, team meetings and school based professional development opportunities to focus on the SIP
 - being accountable for the SIP
 - concern about the sustainability of the initiatives/strategies within the SIP
 - believing in the SIP
 - the importance of teacher buy-in for the SIP
 - valuing the role of the teacher in the SIP; valuing teacher leadership
 - staff is always changing
 - the importance of having autonomy within your school

Expectations

There were several open codes pertaining to the expectations of the SIP. This focused code essentially revealed the expectation of the alignment of goals contained within the SIP with other planning documents like the DIP, the expectation of communication of the SIP, the expectation of implementing the strategies contained in the SIP, and the expectation of being inclusive to all staff for their participation in the SIP.

First, having expectations of alignment between teacher professional goals, school improvement goals, and district improvement goals was welcomed by some but not all. Principals and teachers agreed that links to improvement strategies in the areas of literacy and numeracy were important and easy to manage. One teacher commented that “it makes sense that there is alignment between district and school.” Others suggested that what they really desired was autonomy over their plans in terms of selecting improvement strategies, setting flexible timelines, deciding on what goals get aligned. The latter seemed to be a point of confusion expressed by many. There were concerns

about “if teacher professional growth goals need to be part of the SIP.” This extended to concerns about “fitting the SIP with the DIP” and the pressure by district office of “placing priority on the DIP.” There were questions if “teacher professional goals improve district goals” and issues around “establishing alignment.” Another concern expressed by one teacher was the “number of goals” and whether the current expectation of “alignment to literacy and numeracy is working.”

By contrast, there was agreement on several other expectations relating to the SIP. Teachers expected the SIP to be realistic and contain strategies appropriate to grade level expectations. Principals concurred about keeping the SIP realistic but also expected to see certain things happening in the classroom that were contained in the SIP, specifically strategies that affected student learning. Principals felt “expectations lead to consistency” and “the need to have consistent implementation of strategies if success is to occur.”

Finally, the data revealed issues around who was included in the SIP. Was the SIP designed to include only classroom teachers? Where did specialist teachers like resource and methods, physical education, second language, and guidance teachers fit in the SIP? How were specialist teachers expected to align their personal professional growth goals in the SIP? What was their role in the SIP? One principal commented that their SIP “was designed to be cross curricular” so all teachers could play a role. Another principal commented that “supporting the specialist teacher to consider integrating literacy/numeracy in physical education or vice-versa” and “finding linkages for specialist teachers” was their role. Reciprocally, “reinforcing what specialist teachers are doing in regular classroom compliments SIP efforts.”

Table 15. Summary of focused code and properties: Expectations

FOCUSED CODES	PROPERTIES
Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• alignment of goals• consistent communication about the SIP• implementation of strategies• inclusiveness of teacher specialists using cross-curricular approaches to learning• keeping the SIP realistic

Monitoring and Using Data

I chose to merge both of these focused codes as well simply because of the similarities I was finding in the data. As functions of the plan, both of these focused codes resonated with me in relation to the research question. The data showed that teachers and principals in some schools used SIPs to monitor the focus of what they were doing on a regular basis by reviewing how students were responding to instruction and if they were progressing. One school developed monitoring strategies to track student achievement. This took the form of assigning responsibilities to specific teachers for particular strategies and scheduling regular discussions at staff meetings and during school based professional development days to monitor and discuss the SIP to ensure if the goals were being met. A range of monitoring functions surfaced in one school in particular. These included a focus on processing successes relating to student learning and reflecting on what worked and what did not. There was an emphasis to determine if there were changes in student achievement, if there was short-term growth in one year, “if movement for students below grade level but not reaching grade level expectations took place”, if there was “an increase in behavior exhibited”, if there were high levels of success in the early years, and if the success was limited to a cohort of students. One

teacher concluded, “If the flexible grouping strategy was not implemented then changes in student achievement may not have occurred.” The importance of monitoring academic growth and asking if growth occurred was at the forefront of discussions about monitoring the success of the SIP in this school. In particular using data emerged as a theme. Many teachers and administrators discussed the use of provincial assessment data results and perception surveys to inform the development of the SIP. One teacher commented, “Knowing that the latest results (student achievement) affects what goes in to the plan; data needs to drive change.” Some teachers highlighted the “limitation of the provincial assessment results” and the need to “keep the results in perspective” as well as “knowing how to use them.” One teacher valued “the role of standardized assessments to see how things change over long periods of time.” Many teachers got together as teams to look at data and participated in “marking student work (writing) using co-constructed criteria” created as a result of a strategy within the SIP. Others teachers commented on using data to monitor the SIP and “confirm what teachers are doing well.” The majority of teachers and administrators valued the use of assessment data to plan for student instruction.

In another school, the monitoring of the SIP was done by “focusing on a few goals at a time and determining what was done and focusing on how we are going to get there.” This school also believed that “keeping the SIP on the agenda every month” was important. Discussions about data use were not as prevalent nor was the frequency of monitoring the SIP. This school started the school year by looking at the SIP “to determine if to add or make changes to it” and “got together a couple of times each year to review the SIP by monitoring the whole SIP versus a strategy within it e.g.

differentiation.” Determining if strategies would continue into the next year also was included in their discussions.

Alternatively, another school commented that monitoring the SIP did not take place and reflecting on what was accomplished does not take place because “other duties take priority over monitoring the SIP.” One teacher noted that “the responsibility for monitoring what is happening is the role of the administration and the responsibility for what happens in the classroom is the teachers.” Another teacher noted that there was “no time to spend on the SIP to determine how things are going.” Conversely at the same school a teacher stated, “if not, you lose it” referring to the importance of discussing the SIP on an on-going basis.

One principal noted that monitoring the SIP was “done by either visiting classrooms and questioning if the strategy is taking place e.g. differentiation” or “during principal evaluations when teacher professional growth goals are checked to see if they are being used.”

Table 16. Summary of focused code and properties: Monitoring and Using Data

FOCUSED CODES	PROPERTIES
Monitoring and Using Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● the focus of the SIP ● academic growth ● the frequency of discussions about the SIP ● the implementation of strategies contained in the SIP ● the success of cohorts of students ● the use of data to make decisions

Narrative and Recognizing Differences

There were several open codes (N=49) categorized using the focused code *narrative*. I used only three open codes under the category *recognizing differences*. I was

referring to recognizing differences in principal and teacher needs as well as administrative styles. These differences are reflected in the discussion ahead and are captured under *narrative*. I chose this term simply because, as I was getting to know the participants and their experiences with school improvement planning, it seemed as if some of the information they were telling me did not fit anywhere. The information was simply part of who they were or their experience with school improvement planning. At first I was going to merge this category with *context* but for this discussion I chose to let it stand on its own.

Experiences with school improvement planning ranged from one administrator knowing that it was part of the responsibility of every principal to write a SIP under the *Education Act* to another knowing the research about why we do SIPs and the significance of having teacher input. Another principal reminisced about feeling uncomfortable with this “administrative practice” and recalled a time when teachers were excluded in the development of the SIP. There was acknowledgement by all administrators about how things “are today compared to the past” and that the “thinking is different now than in the past”. School administrators currently give time and attention to the school’s mission, establishing a vision or a process to explore the vision as well as being respectful of what existed prior to their arrival at the school. One administrator begins each school year by identifying guiding questions to determine what needs to be done.

School administrators reflected on their experiences with school improvement planning and identified numerous lessons learned. These included the need to recognize diverse student populations with socioeconomic disparities, the need to step back and

keep results in perspective, the need to validate success based on knowing the students while at the same time being able to predict undesirable results, and the value of formative assessments and knowing what is going on in the classroom. Principals also enjoyed “networking with other principals” and using previous plans to create new plans. One teacher commented on their experiences in several schools and “having awareness of how schools use the SIP in different schools.” Having lots of exposure to many schools and how they operate informed this teacher about the value placed on the SIP. “Discussing the SIP at the high school happens once a semester and the interest in the SIP was not there.”

Another teacher admitted to disregarding the SIP during the first couple of years and was mostly concerned about “wanting to get my house in order” and needing to have his schedule worked out and goals fulfilled before worrying about the SIP.

A wide range of questions about the expectation of aligning goals, the relevance of the SIP and comments pertaining to having consistency in the plans from previous years, sustaining previous goals from past SIPs, and taking an interest in learning more about the SIP surfaced in discussions with teachers and administrators.

This section demonstrated for me that the experiences with school improvement planning for teachers and administrators varied and linked to their use and confidence in school improvement planning.

Table 17. Summary of focused code and properties: Narrative

FOCUSED CODES	PROPERTIES
Narrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • experience with the SIP varied and was linked to their use and confidence in the school improvement plan itself as well as the process of school improvement planning

-
- the need to recognize diverse populations within the school (the audience for the SIP)
 - the ability to know students
 - the ability to predict results
 - value of networking
 - alignment of goals

Networking

This category contained a few patterns as a result of teachers using the SIP.

Networking across grade levels for the purpose of teachers meeting to plan emerged as the theme in this category.

Acknowledging that SIPs are discussed by the whole staff, several teachers at one school noted how working together to plan for all students created an interdependence among themselves that helped “each other stay on track and be accountable for one another.” Meeting with other teachers to see what would take place over the next week, discussing what was happening broadly in literacy and numeracy, discussing struggling students, and helping each other out by sharing examples of what worked were all examples of this collaboration amongst staff at one school. Attempting to meet once a week in grade level teams or through attending professional development sessions together so that teachers could help one another make change was seen as “leading together.” Supporting each other to move children forward by coming together as a staff to create a focus based on student need, getting together as groups of teachers to assess student work, sharing and planning together, celebrating success, and reducing workloads were all seen as positive outcomes of networking.

Table 18. Summary of focused code and properties: Networking

FOCUSED CODES	PROPERTIES
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for the purpose of planning • fostering a sense of interdependence • being supportive to one another • holding each other accountable • problem solving • meeting on a consistent basis • assessing student work • reducing workloads

Summary

The discussion and summaries above highlight the details of each focused code generated from the data. Within each focused code, properties (similarities) were discussed. I decided to merge several focused codes given these similarities. Table 19 includes the original 15 focused codes and those that were merged resulting in eight focused codes.

Table 19. Original focused codes with merged focused codes

ORIGINAL FOCUSED CODES	MERGED FOCUSED CODES	REMAINING FOCUSED CODES
Accountability	Accountability Focus	Accountability
Agency	Agency Engagement Seeking Engagement	Agency
Conflict	Conflict Having Issues with the SIP Power	Disconnectedness
Context	Context	Context
Engagement	Merged with Agency	

Expectations	Expectations	Expectations
Focus	Merged with Accountability	
Having issues with SIP	Merged with Conflict and Power	
Monitoring	Using Data	Monitoring and Using Data
Narrative	Recognizing Differences	Narrative
Networking	Networking	Networking
Power	Merged with Conflict and Having Issues with the SIP	
Recognizing differences	Merged with Narrative	
Seeking engagement	Merged with Agency and Engagement	
Using data	Merged with Narrative	
15	TOTAL	8

Preliminary Attempts at Theory Development

It was at this point that I attempted to generate a few theories from the data.

These included:

Theory 1: If teachers are actively engaged in the selection of improvement strategies, are held accountable for their implementation, then changes in student achievement and team dynamics result.

Theory 2: If principals lead teachers using a shared leadership approach that engages teachers in the design and implementation of the school improvement plan, changes in student achievement take place.

Theory 3: If principals use collaborative structures like team meetings, grade level meetings, school based professional development days, and staff meetings to keep the school improvement plan at the forefront of discussions on a frequent basis, and as a means to focus discussions, changes in student achievement as well as teachers working together results.

Theory 4: There has to be a commitment to the plan, and the intent to implement it, if school improvement is to result.

These theories were preliminary attempts at theory development. At that point, the analysis of the interviews of the remaining participants, the elicited responses and the extant text analysis had not yet occurred. In retrospect, I was attempting to incorporate all data that was grounded by teacher and principal experiences in the development of a theory. In hindsight, it appears that these were attempts at preliminary theory formation and not all encompassing but rather piecemeal characteristics of what I was seeing in the data to that point that was leading to change. I failed to make connections amongst all the data that emerged. Nonetheless, theory development had to start somewhere. It was not until I began the third level of analysis that the theory became refined and inclusive of interview data.

Tertiary Data Analysis

At this point, the identification of the eight focused codes with corresponding properties seemed to be waiting for me to make sense of them. I began looking at the focused codes and their properties closer searching for connections within and between them in the hopes of refining the attempts I made earlier at theory development.

Asking myself again *what is happening in the data?* and *what does it mean?* (Charmaz, 2006) challenged me to make connections within the data resulting in entering the tertiary data analysis phase of this study as identified earlier in this chapter – Figure 1 Data Analysis Framework. In this phase of data analysis I used another grounded theory coding method known as theoretical coding, which led to theoretical development – that is using codes to develop a theory. In addition, I used the final criterion for significance -

researcher resonance – to continue to make sense of the data. Before discussing the findings further, a brief explanation of these terms is needed.

Charmaz (2006) notes that *theoretical coding* “is a sophisticated level of coding that follows the codes you have selected during focused coding” (p. 63). She refers to theoretical codes as “conceptualizing” (p. 63). Theoretical coding refers to the process of examining data in theoretical rather than descriptive terms to raise the level of abstraction in the emerging theory. According to Charmaz, “in short, theoretical codes specify possible relationships between categories you have developed in your focused coding” (p. 63). She concludes:

Theoretical codes are integrative; they lend form to the focused codes you have collected. These codes may help you tell an analytic story that has coherence.

Hence, these codes not only conceptualize how your substantive codes are related, but also move your analytic story in a theoretical direction. (p. 63)

Discovering the connection between categories, properties, and dimensions leads to *theory development*. The practice of making connections and finding patterns in the data can be facilitated by the use of models (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to Rich (2012), these models are “diagrammatic displays” (p. 5) that “offer a way to condense what are possibly pages of explanation into a simple figure” (p. 5). As Rich concludes, “diagramming is the core process of microanalysis” (p. 5). In his work that examines teachers’ use of technology, Rich agrees with Dey’s (1999, cited by Rich, 2012) finding that “the use of models is not only a way of representing ideas, but also a way of developing them” (p. 5). Rich reflects on models and diagrams, concluding:

My understanding of what was happening with “reasons not to use technology” was becoming confounded and muddled by simply writing the memo. I was finding areas where I saw contrasts, but could not see convergences. Drawing a graphic helped me to see these points of convergence. (p. 19)

Against this background, I re-examined the focused codes many times. At this point I was attempting to develop an emerging theory grounded in the data I analyzed.

Making Explicit My Connections

Using the eight merged focused codes discussed earlier I made decisions about regrouping them using theoretical codes to begin my “analytical” story. When I reviewed the merged focused codes and their corresponding properties, I was getting a sense of what the data were telling me. I constructed theoretical codes using researcher resonance. I needed to make decisions about the data, reorganize the focused codes, make connections between them, particularly those that resonated with me both as a researcher and from my background in the area of school improvement planning, and begin to shape the analytical story. Although not a diagram, I began with a series of scribbled lines from each category that led to a new “cluster” category in the form of a box. This was the first step I took in shaping my theory. What resulted were five boxes with focused codes and scribbled notes about what I thought the data meant.

First, the data showed that several teachers and administrators knew what to do with SIPs. The data showed a plethora of actions resulting from the use of them. I used the theoretical code *Sense of Agency* with the scribbled note of *knowing what to do* to refer to this data. Second, there were several teachers and administrators passionate about creating a quality SIP, one that was realistic and meaningful to teachers and students, as

well as its importance on affecting potential change in their school. I used the theoretical code *Sense of Purpose* with the scribbled note of *knowing why it is important* to refer to this data. Next, the data showed that several teachers and administrators were working toward change collaboratively and collectively. They were helping each other and were focused on the collective vision and mission of the school. They held each other accountable, knew what their responsibilities were not only for themselves but for others as well, and made sure they monitored the direction of their work. I used the theoretical code *Sense of Interdependence* with the scribbled note of *knowing their responsibilities and keeping each other accountable* to refer to these data. Fourth, the data showed influence of both internal and external undercurrents that affected the context of the school including the teacher and administrator narratives that exposed their experiences with school improvement planning. Some teachers and administrators knew how to deal with challenges that were external to the school or crosscurrents among staff and forged on with the work at hand. Others did not and lost confidence in school improvement planning having little or no buy-in. I used the theoretical code *Sense of Other* with the scribbled note of *knowing how to deal with the challenges external to the classroom* to refer to these data. Finally, the data showed that many teachers and principals wanted to do better for themselves but more importantly for their students. They wanted to be inclusive of all staff, account for the actions they were taking with the SIP, hold one another accountable, knew the importance of moving forward, dealt with the unknown and challenges that were extrinsic to the classroom or the school while at the same time accounting for changes that resulted. I used the theoretical code *Sense of Change* with the scribbled note of *knowing how to account for change* to refer to these data. Table 20

summarizes the theoretical codes, a brief description of what they mean and the placement of the merged focused codes discussed earlier.

Table 20. Theoretical codes, what it means, with merged focused codes

THEORETICAL CODES	WHAT IT MEANS	MERGED FOCUS CODES
Sense of Agency	Knowing what to do and empowered to act	Agency Expectations Monitoring and Using Data
Sense of Purpose	Knowing why it is important	Context Narrative
Sense of Interdependence	Knowing what your responsibilities are; knowing how to help one another; keeping each other accountable	Networking
Sense of Other	Knowing how to deal with the challenges that are external to the classroom	Disconnectedness
Sense of Change	Knowing how to account for change	Accountability

While Table 20 makes explicit the theoretical codes that began to shape a theory about how teachers use SIPs to make change in their schools, the previous discussion about the focused codes showed variances within the categories in relation their properties and dimensions. Tables 11-18 identified the focused codes with similar properties. Dimension of these properties, however, were not included in the table even though several references were made in the discussions about the focused codes. Introduced earlier, dimensions “answer questions about the variance of such properties” (Rich, 2012, p. 5). An example of a dimension might be the “extent of use,” whereas a property might simply be “use.” In short, “dimensions measure whereas properties describe” (p. 5). Against this background, I chose the “extent of use” as a dimension of

each theoretical code because the data showed that not all schools, teachers, or administrators participated, acted upon, believed, or supported particular aspects of the SIP. In other words, a central dimension among various properties and therefore its associated theoretical code referred to the extent of use – whether something occurred or not. In addition, I noticed that this factor aligned itself with whether changes in schools were happening or not. Table 21 identifies the theoretical codes I used through the lens of the dimension - extent of use - as related to whether change occurred in schools. The theoretical codes leading to change were renamed to reflect instances when the data showed that change was not taking place.

Table 21. Theoretical codes and change

Happening and Leading to Change		Not Happening and Not Leading to Change	
Theoretical Codes	What it Means	Theoretical Codes	What it Means
Sense of Agency	Knowing what to do	Sense of Complacency (Excuse)	Not knowing what to do-let it pass
Sense of Purpose	Knowing why it is important	Sense of Disillusionment	Confusion; how does it fit
Sense of Interdependence	Knowing what your responsibilities are; knowing how to help one another; keeping each other accountable	Sense of Isolation	Content to work in their classroom doing what they have always done
Sense of Other as Navigable	Knowing how to deal with the challenges that are external to the classroom	Sense of Other as Defeatist	Too much change; can't keep up; this too shall pass attitude
Sense of Change	Knowing how to account for change	Sense of Perpetual Motion (Resistance to Change)	Always done this way; not concerned about change; job is to teach and cover the curriculum; keep my house in order

At this point, using the theoretical codes with their explanations identified above, secondary theory formation took place and I developed the following substantive theory about how teachers use SIPs to make change in schools:

If teachers and administrators know the value of a quality school improvement plan, know what to do with it, can work interdependently while dealing with influences external to their work, and can monitor the SIP for its effectiveness, then change will occur in their school. Conversely, the opposite of these characteristics results in change not taking place in schools.

The Remaining Interviews

Up to this point, I had analyzed a tremendous amount of data from 12 transcribed interviews resulting in the substantive theory proposed above. There were 15 interviews from five participants that remained to be analyzed along with what was contained in the elicited responses as well as the review of the SIPs and other forms of extant texts that I used as part of the data collection methods. The remaining 15 interviews were analyzed and several quotes were selected to support the theoretical codes identified in Table 21 as well as to demonstrate that theoretical saturation was achieved with no new themes emerging. The findings from this analysis are contained in Appendix O.

Summary

This chapter emphasized the findings from the interviews, including a description of the coding processes leading to an initial theory statement grounded in the data. It provided an explanation of ‘constant comparative analysis’, which is a central

characteristic of any study using grounded theory methodology. In addition, this chapter introduced the need to establish a data analysis framework to make sense of the voluminous amount of data generated from the interviews. This chapter concluded by acknowledging that the remaining interviews were analyzed and theoretical saturation, at least from the interviews, had occurred. Data from the other methods used in this study need to be considered to help inform final attempts at theory formation. This will be discussed next in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Findings from Extant Text Analysis

The previous chapter made explicit the findings from the interview data and revealed a second attempt at theory formation about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their schools. It also introduced other data sources known as extant texts to help answer the research question. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings of the extant text analysis that included data sources such as the provincial assessment results, elicited responses, SIPs, school improvement surveys completed by teachers, and school review reports. These data sources were selected for a few reasons. First, I felt these data sources would potentially contain information beyond what was grounded in the interview data that commented on the context of school improvement planning. In addition, I wanted to determine if change occurred in the school, not only related to student achievement but also to other features of the school that could be attributed to the context of the school and the use of the SIP.

Importance of Extant Texts in Grounded Theory Methodology

As mentioned in chapter 3, extant text can complement interview methods by challenging the researcher to consider some of the following questions:

What are the parameters of the information? On what and whose facts does the information rest? What does the information mean to various participants? What does the information leave out? Who is the intended audience for the information? How, if at all, does the information affect actions? (Charmaz, 2006, p. 38).

I wanted to use other data sources to provide information that was independent of the interview data. As Charmaz (2006) concluded:

Comparisons between field notes and written documents spark new insights about the relative congruence-or lack of it-between words and deeds. Both organizational rhetoric and reports may pale in the face of observed worlds. These texts may fulfill intriguing organizational purposes, but researchers cannot assume that they mirror organizational processes. Thus, such texts may provide useful statements about an organization's professed images and claimed objectives-the front stage view aimed to shape its public reputation. (p. 38)

The analysis of all forms of extant texts used in this study took place months after the analysis of the interview data. This was intentional to avoid any preconceived categories that would potentially be exposed from the extant text analysis and ultimately bias what was examined in the interview data. The categories that emerged as a result of the coding procedures during each phase of analysis were grounded in the data and were therefore not influenced by data from these other sources.

What follows is an analysis and discussion about each form of extant text used in this study beginning with a review of the provincial assessment results of each of the schools involved in this study.

Provincial Assessment Results

For more than 10 years, the New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has administered a provincial reading assessment in Grade 2 towards the end of each school year. As stated earlier, I chose this assessment as one indicator of change because of its familiarity in my previous work as a district administrator as well as its consistency in terms of implementation as related to the grade level and the time of year it is administered. It remains as the only assessment measure

administered by the New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in elementary schools at present.

Assessments are scored by the New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (NB EECD) and school-level data are reported using three categories: *below appropriate achievement*, *appropriate achievement*, and *strong achievement*. There are also corresponding cut points (i.e., range of scores between 60% and 80%) for each category. The result reported publicly is a combination of the percentage of students scoring appropriate achievement and strong achievement, commonly referred to as *school % at Appropriate or above*. In addition, the NB EECD sets a target standard of achievement for each area of assessment. In the case of the Grade 2 reading assessment, the target standard is 90% of students achieving appropriate or above. This information was important since the majority of schools design their SIPs in response to the results of this assessment. This was the case for the SIPs of the three schools in this study.

Table 22 shows the provincial assessment results in Grade 2 reading for the schools involved in this study.

Table 22. Provincial Assessment Results in Grade 2 Reading

School A: % of Students at Appropriate or above			Target
2014	2015	2016	2016
91.5%	65.5%	65.7%	90%
School B: % of Students at Appropriate or above			Target
2014	2015	2016	2016
78.7%	79.4%	78.1%	90%

School C: % of Students at Appropriate or above			Target
2014	2015	2016	2016
68.0%	66.7%	59.4%	90%

The data show that, over a three-year period, the performance of Grade 2 students on the provincial reading assessment decreased. The most significant decrease in student achievement was in School A, greater than 25 percentage points. This appears to be an anomaly and can likely be attributed to the cohort of students tested and not directly to the SIP as the plan itself extended over a three-year period. The results of School B remained relatively the same in each of the three years examined. School C showed a decrease of eight percentage points. Only one school, School A, reached the expected standard but only in one (2014) of three years that results were examined.

Clearly the data shared previously from the interviews identified literacy as one of the improvement areas. This was also confirmed in the SIP of each school as reflected in the improvement goals. Central to each of the SIPs reviewed were concerted efforts to increase literacy results at the Grade 2 level. Not only did both teachers and administrators highlight literacy as a key area of focus but also the data from the interviews showed alignment with both teacher professional growth goals as well as mandates from district office to improve results. Collectively, in 2016 there were more students in these three schools not comprehending, both literally and inferentially, what they were reading, at least according to the assessment results than in 2014. These results are consistent with a downward provincial trend since 2010.

Elicited Responses

Another form of extant text used in this study was elicited responses. This took the form of two questions I posed to each of the participants (N=9) at the conclusion of their interviews. Each participant was given the questions, one per page, with no requirement to self-identify and a self-addressed return envelope. These were the questions for the administrators:

1. How do teachers use the school improvement plan in their work at this school?
2. Does the use of the school improvement plan result in making change in this school? If so, describe the change.

These were the questions for the teachers:

1. How do you use the school improvement plan in your work at this school?
2. Does the use of the school improvement plan result in making change in this school? If so, describe the change.

Only two participants responded. I will refer to them as Participant A and Participant B.

To protect their confidentiality, there was no requirement to self-identify. Therefore there is no correlation between Participant A's elicited response and Participant 1 (Appendix P) from the interviews.

On Question 1, Participant A provided this response:

- It helps them make decisions when they are asked for input on school decisions.
- It helps them to set priorities in planning and assessment by linking what they do on a daily basis to the overarching goal of the school.
- It links the teachers together in a common purpose for how outcomes are prioritized.

Participant B provided this response to Question 1:

- Use it to guide our instruction.
- To plan and follow through within our PLC.
- Flexible grouping.
- Personalized learning.
- Rights respecting.
- Student led clubs.
- Learning in-depth.
- Whole school activities.
- Mindfulness
- 7 Habits.

For Question 2, here was the response from Participant A: “The school improvement plan’s most important impact is to draw teacher attention to the “end in mind.” As such, some teachers need professional development assistance to change their current practice to better align with the school’s overall goal.” Participant B offered this response to Question 2:

Yes it does as it gives our school a focus, an end in mind. Gives us all a sense of direction. Reflecting on the SIP drives our school and our PLC so that we are continuously formatively assessing ourselves. We look at where we are as a school and PLC, where do we want to go, what do we need to get there?

The number of elicited responses received was disappointing. I can only guess at the reasons why the number of elicited responses was limited. My guess is teachers and administrators are busy people and schools are busy places. However, the responses

received, as a form of extant text, were examined against the theoretical codes I developed from the interview data using *researcher resonance* as one criterion of significance.

The response from Participant A to the first question represented *sense of agency*. The response showed several actions being taken by teachers. These included *making decisions* and *setting priorities*. In addition, this participant's final point—“it links the teachers together in a common purpose for how outcomes are prioritized”—linked to two other theoretical codes: *sense of purpose* and *sense of interdependence*.

The response from Participant B to the first question clearly represented the theoretical code *sense of agency* reflected in “use it to guide our instruction” and “to plan” as well as a range of activities or initiatives that resulted from using the SIP and attributed to another theoretical code *sense of change*. Examples included in the response were flexible grouping, student-led clubs, and whole school activities, to name a few.

The response from both participants to the second question represented the theoretical code *sense of purpose*. The reference to the “end in mind” and “a focus” was synonymous with what was shared in the interviews. In addition “gives us all a sense of direction” and the “SIP drives our school and our PLC” clearly reflected this theoretical code. Moreover, the response “we are continuously formatively assessing ourselves. We look at where we are as a school and PLC, where do we want to go, what do we need to get there?” reflected other theoretical codes, *sense of agency* and *sense of interdependence*.

Although limited by the number of elicited responses received, these data reinforce the theoretical codes discovered in the data from the interviews and support aspects of the grounded theory disclosed in the last chapter.

School Improvement Plans

I asked principals for a copy of their SIP. As noted previously, “written documents spark new insights about the relative congruence-or lack of it-between words and deeds” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 38). The theoretical codes that emerged in the data reflected the words from the interviews but were they matched by actions or strategies contained in the SIP? Was there congruence? I used five criteria generated from the interview data to review the SIPs.

First, I looked at the actions contained in the SIPs. These actions represented a *sense of agency*. Second, I reviewed the design of the SIP. I examined its components to see if there were explicit links to the purpose of the SIP. From my experience with school improvement planning, as well as what emerged in the interview data, references to the school mission, vision, and goal setting would align themselves with a *sense of purpose*. Third, I looked for evidence relating to teachers working together. This was represented in both the wording of the actions, such as references to who was responsible for an action or strategy, as well as in the wording of the monitoring function contained in the SIP. For example: “the K-2 team will monitor each month the progress of students in flexible reading groups.” Evidence of teachers working together would reflect a *sense of interdependence*. Next, I scanned the SIPs for any evidence of actions or strategies that linked to something larger than the plan itself. Often schools are faced with multiple improvement plans or initiatives imposed by others outside of their control. These might

include technology plans, schoolwide behavior plans, or positive learning environment plans, and a range of other initiatives that come from outside the school. This indicated a *sense of other as navigable*. Finally, I determined if the SIP contained any evidence of change by examining references to historical or baseline data as well as references to previous successes that were built upon. These references would represent that a *sense of change* took place.

What follows is a description of each of the SIPs that I reviewed. I organized each description according to any evidence that aligned itself to one or more of the criteria just mentioned followed by a brief discussion.

School A's SIP

School A's SIP was three letter size pages in length. It identified a three year timeline and was for a K-5 school.

Sense of agency. This SIP had a component titled Targeted Research-Based Strategies/Actions. The SIP referenced two priorities: "to focus on and incorporate best practices in assessment" (p. 1) and "to collaborate around instructional practices, as well as data collection, analysis and interpretation" (p. 3). Each priority area identified targeted research-based strategies and actions for both literacy and numeracy. I limited this review to only those pertaining to literacy. The targeted research-based strategies and actions for the first priority included:

1. Teachers will use phonological and running records for collecting data used as formative and summative assessment. Students will be placed in flexible groupings.

2. Teachers will use questions/quick sheet of inferential, literal, and critical questions during guided reading and writing conferencing.
3. Teachers will assess students using Words Their Way program.
4. Grade level teams will determine writing benchmarks to correspond with reporting periods.
5. Mock marking sessions for writing will occur at each team level corresponding to reporting periods.

The targeted research-based strategies and actions for the second priority included:

1. Team meetings will be held biweekly to discuss data and instructional strategies around questioning.
2. An ESS (Education Support Services) team member will be present at the team meetings on a bi-weekly basis.
3. Head, Heart, Hand questions will be included in guided reading lessons and included in lesson plans.
4. Questioning strategies will be included at every monthly staff meeting.
5. Essential questions will be included for every lesson and communicated to students.
6. Book studies (Teach Like a Champion, Guided Math in Action, Reading Strategies Book)

Sense of purpose. This SIP had four references that would align with this theoretical code. First, as mentioned already, two school priorities were identified. Second, two goals were stated and linked to each priority:

1. Goal 1 – By the end of 2015-16, 90% of students will be reading at appropriate grade level in both English Prime and Immersion Programs. By the end of 2015-16 there will be a 10% increase in the number of students who are achieving 3 in writing and a 5% who are receiving 3+ to 4 in writing. A numeracy goal was also added in this section.
2. All teachers will work together in weekly grade level teams to maximize student-learning resulting in a 10-20% increase of students reaching year-end benchmarks.

Next, a section titled Area of Focus was identified in this SIP. It contained two areas of focus:

1. Teachers will use common assessments in their instruction.
2. Questioning for Learning

The fourth and final reference to *sense of purpose* was a section titled

Justification. Two justifications were included in this SIP:

1. Priority 1 of DIP (District Improvement Plan) focuses on assessment practices to improve student achievement.
2. With the various learning needs of our students, it is difficult for one teacher to effectively meet each individual student's academic level. Through collaboration of planning, instruction, and regrouping, research has shown increased academic achievement.

Sense of interdependence. This SIP had a few references to teachers working together. One was the reference to students being placed in flexible groupings. This requires teachers to meet, use data, and make decisions about student placement. I can only assume

this happened. Other references to grade level teams, team meetings, Education Support Services (ESS) teams, and staff meetings were included in this SIP. Although these references cannot equate to a *sense of interdependence*, they assumed that teachers would come together to discuss, share, and make decisions. Another component of the document was a section known as responsibility/timeline. References to who was responsible for the targeted research-based strategies/actions were not consistent as references to timelines. References to responsibility appeared in the form of teachers, team leaders, ESS Team Members, or administration.

Sense of other as navigable. This SIP contained a few lines outside the template titled Professional Learning/Resources. It listed the titles of several professional resources, the titles of resource positions (e.g., literacy lead teachers), as well as curricular resources and initiatives either as documents, approaches (Universal Design for Learning), or links to electronic sources of information.

Sense of change. This SIP contained several linkages to this theoretical code. In fact, four sections were included in this SIP that could have accounted for a *sense of change*. These sections were Baseline, Indicators of Success, Accountability, and Progress Notes. The Baseline section named four categories of assessment measures. These were teacher perception surveys, classroom assessments that contained seven measures, achievement reports, and provincial assessments. While these were mentioned, only the teacher perception surveys contained data (93% of our staff feel they work within a team and 80% of staff are involved in long term instructional planning with colleagues). The Indicators of Success section made reference to data sources again, like running record binders, class profiles, and grade level data indicating that these sources

would indicate student growth. There was no evidence of student growth on this plan except for one reference to make improvement in the area of math – data from Key Skills Math will indicate a 5% growth from September-January in K-2 and 3-5. Data will indicate a 5% growth from January-June. The Accountability section mentioned what teachers will do. For example, teachers will administer running records or phonological awareness assessments during each reporting period or more as needed. Finally, the Progress Notes section of this SIP was largely left blank. Two references were included in this SIP. One referred to when an initiative would begin and the other made reference to the proportion of students at various levels of writing.

Discussion. This SIP was an example of a design that had the intention to improve reading, writing, and math achievement. Although the data for this school showed a 26% decrease in achievement over a two-year period on the Grade 2 provincial reading assessment, the SIP itself cannot be the reason for these results. In 2014, the data showed 91.5% of students achieved appropriate or above. The data in 2015 (65.5%) and 2016 (65.7%) were consistent but significantly lower than in 2014. The achievement for the cohort of students assessed in 2014 appeared to be an anomaly and reasons for the exceptional result of 91.5% can only be speculative. Given that the SIP reviewed for this school had a three-year timeline (2014-2016) and based on the criterion of researcher resonance, my conclusion is that the 2014 result had little to do with the clarity or the quality of the SIP but more so with the cohort of students assessed. Against this background, I was concerned about the ambitiousness of the goals in terms of the percentage of increase (*there will be a 5% increase from September-January and then another 5% increase from January-June*) that was stated particularly in the absence of

baseline data for the cohort of students being assessed. In addition, there was no acknowledgement of the context of the school and any information related to the cohort of students (e.g., socioeconomic level, literacy in the home, family engagement), not to mention the variability in the results over a three-year period. While this SIP had a component titled *Targeted Research-Based Strategies/Actions*, there was no reference to research about any of the strategies and actions contained in the plan. The absence of who was responsible for implementing the strategies and actions and who was responsible to ensure that implementation occurred was not made explicit.

These were just a few reasons that point to the questionable quality of this SIP and raised questions about its implementation. On the surface, the design of the plan showed promise, especially in relation to aligning itself with the five theoretical codes identified from the interview data. My speculation about what happened to this plan had more to do with the “relative congruence-or lack of it-between words and deeds” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 38).

School B’s SIP

School B’s SIP was five legal size pages in length. It identified a one year timeline and was for a K-5 school.

Sense of agency. The design of this SIP included a section on strategies and actions. The plan contained eight goals for two focus areas. Some goals contained more than one strategy and action. The strategies and actions for the first area of focus (to increase the number of students meeting with academic success in Mathematics and Language) were only linked to Language, specifically writing. There were no strategies and actions for Mathematics. The strategies and actions contained in the SIP in most

cases were worded in a way that could determine if they were completed or not. For example, *assessing demand pieces together a minimum of three times a year during reporting periods*. This strategy identified what was going to happen (*assess demand writing*), how often, and when it would take place, (*minimum of three times a year during reporting periods*).

Sense of purpose. This SIP included numerous sections that aligned with this theoretical code. These included vision and mission statements, an Area of Focus Alignment Table, two school areas of focus with justification statements for each as well as team goals. The vision statement made reference to student learning and global citizenship. The mission statement made reference to the use of best educational practices and a world class learning environment among other things.

The Area of Focus Alignment Table contained three subsections. These included the NB EECD Areas of Focus (Provincial Improvement Plan-PIP), the District Area of Focus (District Improvement Plan-DIP) and the School Areas of Focus (School Improvement Plan-SIP). This SIP made reference to “3 year Priorities” in the latter section as well. Four areas of focus were included in the EECD section:

1. Improve achievement in language, mathematical and scientific literacies.
2. Improve learning environments and instruction practices to ensure inclusive 21st century education.
3. Increase opportunities for youth to develop enterprising habits and to engage in active citizenship.
4. Integrate the early childhood and K-12 school sectors.

Under the District Areas of Focus, three priorities were identified. Priority 1: Focus on Assessment for, as and of Learning to Improve Student Achievement- All (name of school district) Schools will attain higher levels of academic success. This priority was aligned with the NB EECD's first area of focus. Priority 2: Enhance Positive Learning and Working Environment- All (name of school district) Schools will demonstrate improvements in inclusive instruction and intervention practices within a positive learning and working environment. Priority 3: Augment Shared Leadership Capacity – All (name of school district) Schools will build collaborative leadership capacity to enhance student success. Priorities 2 and 3 were aligned with EECD's second area of focus. The SIP referenced no priorities for EECD's third and fourth areas of focus.

In a similar fashion, the first school area of focus, to increase the numbers of students meeting with academic success in Mathematics and writing, aligned itself with both the District and EECD's first Area of Focus. There was no mention of scientific literacies in this section. The second school area of focus, to have all staff reach their teaching and leadership potential and to empower distributive leadership, appeared to align itself, at least in its layout in the SIP, with the second District and EECD areas of focus. But given its content, I think it logically aligned itself with the District's third priority. There were no references made to the District's second priority or EECD's third and fourth areas of focus.

The justification statement for the first area of focus was “observations and conversations during weekly PLC team meetings indicate that students need to continue to build their skills in Mathematics and in Language-specifically in the area of writing.”

The justification statement for the second area of focus was “school improvement review data and core leadership team conversations indicate a need to continue to work on having all staff reach their teaching and leadership potential.”

There were eight goals within this SIP. Six goals were attached to the first area of focus and two to the second area of focus. Below most goals were Present Level of Performance (PLOP) sections. Although incomplete, three goals contained PLOP data.

Sense of interdependence. This SIP contained a section titled Responsibility. There were several references made to either a team or the name of a teacher or administrator being assigned responsibility for specific strategies and actions. A few references were made to a professional learning community (PLC) that involved teachers working together.

Sense of other as navigable. This SIP made reference to the *other* in that the Area of Focus-Alignment Table included EECD and the District areas of focus. Although it did not identify any actions from either EECD or the District that would support the school, it seemed as if it was included to demonstrate alignment of the areas of focus. For what purpose, I am not certain. In addition, there were references made to actions that involved others. For example, the French immersion teachers wanted to partner with the local French schools to plan outings and activities. Moreover, as part of teachers reaching their leadership potential, one action included finding and participating in professional learning opportunities in leadership. Logically this would be facilitated outside the school. The *sense of other as navigable* did not appear to be a binding constraint.

Sense of change. Three components of this SIP aligned with this theoretical code. These components included Timelines, Monitoring, and Evidence of Success. In addition, although not a section unto itself, the PLOP subsection with the goals fitted here as well. The timelines and monitoring sections either referenced particular months or shorter units of time. One example would be “at weekly team meetings.” There were no references to who was responsible for the monitoring function. Under the Evidence of Success section, there were references in some cases to what teachers were working on although not specific in relation to what change resulted. In other cases there were references to data by month or throughout the year. The PLOP contained some data but was generally inconsistent to clearly demonstrate that any change occurred.

Discussion. The Grade 2 provincial assessment results in reading remained consistent over a three-year time period in this school. The NB EECD provided no data in relation to this school’s focus areas of mathematics and writing. There was some evidence that the contents and design of this school improvement plan aligned with the theoretical codes extracted from the interview data. Similar to School A, this SIP raised several questions for me relating to its quality. For example, there was an absence of any strategies and actions for mathematics; how will this area of focus change? In addition, while the alignment table made a connection to EECD and District, what was their role with the school areas of focus? What were the strategies and actions that they would do to support the school? This concern was grounded in the interview data as well. The role of the district and province in helping schools improve was not made explicit in any of the data collection methods. Moreover, while I recognize the PLOP can serve a purpose, especially in establishing baseline data or providing a historical perspective, why were

there no data or any actions to collect data? How will the school know if change occurred? How will this school know if the strategies and actions were implemented if no one is given the responsibility for monitoring?

I was also confused about the part of the SIP that focused on “language” with different strategies assigned to English students as compared to the French Immersion students. In short, there appeared to be actions that pertained to writing for English students and actions related to oral language for the French students. While this may suffice for the needs of the students in both programs, there was no measure or PLOP for the French immersion students to monitor if change will occur. Finally, the strategies and actions in this SIP appeared to use different fonts and sizes. This might indicate that teams of teachers collaborated and submitted improvement actions for the plan. While submissions from several teachers may be seen as progressive, it also might explain its disconnectedness as related to some of the concerns already mentioned.

School C’s SIP

School C’s SIP was ten legal size pages in length. It identified a one year timeline and was for a K-8 school.

Sense of agency. Similar to the other plans reviewed already, this SIP also contained a section on strategies and actions. There was a plethora of strategies and actions contained in this plan. Some were numbered and loosely aligned with a goal while others were bulleted and assumed to be aligned with another goal. Some were very specific like “will complete guided reading sessions at least 3 to 5 times per week,” while others were nebulous like “model how to use strategies in both fiction and non-fiction texts.” This strategy and action: “3 mornings/week during Paw Fit, students will be

involved in small group intervention with their homeroom teachers” was repeated four times in this section with no explicit alignment made to the goals. Nonetheless, this SIP contained numerous strategies and actions that clearly linked to this theoretical code.

Sense of purpose. The design of this SIP was identical to School B. In a similar fashion, this SIP included numerous sections that aligned with this theoretical code. These included vision and mission statements, an Area of Focus Alignment Table, and four school areas of focus with justification statements for each as well as team goals. The vision statement made reference to fostering collaboration, personal strengths, and shared leadership. The mission statement made reference to a collaborative learning environment, positive relationships, high expectations, and lifelong learning among other things.

Similar to School B, the Area of Focus Alignment Table contained the same information for EECD and the District. This SIP contained four areas of foci. The first school area of focus – teachers will improve teaching and learning with a focus on Math and Language Arts - aligned itself with both the District and EECD’s first area of focus. Again, there was no mention of scientific literacies in this section. The second school area of focus – teachers will continue to develop their planning for all learners in order to ensure appropriate instruction, interventions, and supports are provided - appeared to align itself, at least in its layout in the SIP, with the second District and EECD areas of focus. The third school area of focus – the staff will enhance the functions and responsibilities of the Core Leadership Team appeared to align itself, at least in its layout in the SIP, with the third District priority but with EECD’s second area of focus. This is an example of misalignment. The fourth school area of focus - all students will continue

to be active citizens and build skills necessary to be a successful member of the school community appeared to align itself, at least in its layout in the SIP, with EECD's third area of focus. There was no District area of focus to either EECD or the school. Finally, there was no District or school area of focus aligned with EECD's fourth area of focus.

The justification statement for the first area of focus was "School, District, and Provincial data trends over the last number of years continues to indicate a need for specific goals, strategies, and actions to help students and staff focus on and improve literacy and numeracy." The justification statement for the remaining three school areas of focus did not appear in the remainder of the SIP. There were eight goals within this SIP as well. It appeared that all eight goals aligned with the first area of focus. The goals for the remaining three school areas of focus were not evident in the plan. Similar to School B, this plan contained a Present Level of Performance (PLOP) section underneath the goals identified in the plan. In comparison to the other SIPs, the goals in this plan contained references to time and data analysis. For example, by December 15th, 2016, 10 out of 22 students in grades K, 1, and 2 will.... Other goals were not as clear. For example, by the end of October 2016, nine out of 18 students in K, 1, and 2, through data have shown regression from June to September and are approaching grade level rubric, will be where June data placed them. I assume this means that these students will return to levels at the end of the previous school year. Knowing the goal for that current school year was unknown.

Sense of interdependence. Like the other SIPs, School C's SIP contained a section titled Responsibility. There were several references made to a team in this section. The names of only two teachers appeared as being assigned responsibility for

specific strategies and actions in this SIP. Within some of the goals, references were made to team members. This plan, as compared to the other two SIPs reviewed, identified individual teacher PLOP (present level of performance). From this I assumed that teachers were working together and were held accountable for results.

Sense of other as navigable. In a similar fashion as School B's SIP, this SIP made reference to the *other* in that the Area of Focus-Alignment Table included EECD and the District areas of focus. Similarly, it did not identify any actions from either EECD or the District that would support the school. This SIP showed no evidence of the *sense of other as navigable* nor did it show it as a binding constraint.

Sense of change. Like School B's SIP, there were three components of this SIP that aligned with this theoretical code. These components included Timelines, Monitoring, and Evidence of Success. Similarly, although not a section unto itself, the PLOP subsection with the goals fitted here as well. Once again, the timelines and monitoring sections either referenced particular months or shorter units of time. There were no references to who was responsible for the monitoring function of the plan but rather references were made to events like team meetings or tools like running records and Dolch word lists. Under the Evidence of Success section there were references in some cases to what teachers had accomplished. For example, "As of October 2016, 9 out of the 18 students have increased their skills and are now achieving a 3 in sight word reading and reading readiness." This section also included the names of teachers and the shift in their results. For example "teacher A – 4/5 have moved to acceptable in the conventions strand."

Discussion. The Grade 2 provincial assessment results in reading decreased by 8% over a three-year time period in this school. The NB EECD provides no data in relation to this school's focus area of mathematics. However, in a similar manner to literacy and beyond provincial assessment results, this plan contained several references to changes resulting from the work that teachers were doing with their students.

No improvement plan was ever designed perfectly. In fact, the literature review in chapter two reminded us that most improvement plans do not yield intended results. There are concerns with this plan particularly related to clarity and the preciseness of the strategies and actions. When a plan identifies "model how to use strategies in both fiction and non-fiction texts," I wonder which strategies were being referred to. Do teachers know them? Will the ambiguity of particular sections, like the clarity of strategies, in this plan impede results?

I saw potential in this plan. It needed some tweaking. It showed some changes thus far especially related to the context of the school and in the use of formative assessments. With a little more work, I think it had the potential to achieve more changes particularly those related to student achievement.

Summary

The analysis of the SIPs for the schools in this study showed several shortcomings in their quality and completeness, specifically in relation to who was responsible for implementing strategies and monitoring their implementation, the clarity and preciseness of the strategies and actions contained in the plan, as well as the incongruence and alignment of goals in relation to external supports such as district office or the NB EECD. I suspect the plans I received were tentative and still under

construction. I cannot account for their incompleteness or for the shortcomings I discussed thus far. At first glance this might be seen as undesirable to those that feel strongly that plans need to be complete and followed with precision. I speculate that time to complete the plans, not to mention time to implement their strategies in many schools, is a binding constraint. On the other hand, plans that are tentative in nature can allow for flexibility and adaptation once the school year is underway. Additionally, to equate the quality of the plan with increased results is premature, especially given the complexity of demonstrating this relationship (Fernandez, 2011), as well as the notion that planning documents do not account for the affective benefits like those grounded in the interview data. At this point, judgments about the effectiveness of planning can be made in haste if measures like standardized assessment results are used as the only indicator of change resulting from the use of SIPs. This study and its findings concludes otherwise in that SIPs are documents that help teachers and administrators capture their sense of purpose, what they plan on doing to address an improvement goal, how they work together, how they deal with initiatives coming at them from outside forces like business or interest groups, as well as how they know when things are improving. It is in these conversations, meetings, and planning sessions that change is not captured in SIPs, as was revealed and grounded in the data from the interviews in the last chapter.

School Improvement Survey

The fourth form of extant texts I analyzed in this study were School Improvement Surveys. The NB EECD administered a School Improvement Survey to teachers as part of the School Improvement Review process during the time period of this study. With the most recent change in government, both the administration of the surveys and the school

reviews were stopped as part of cost cutting measures. At the time they were used, the School Improvement Survey contained 69 statements organized in seven categories:

1. Common Vision, Mission, and Goals
2. Instructional Leadership
3. Effective Instructional Practices and Continuous Monitoring of Student Progress
4. Supports for Instruction
5. Positive School Environment
6. Collaboration and Staff Interaction
7. Ongoing Professional Learning.

In recent years, surveys were administered prior to a School Improvement Review taking place. The data provided a source of information to help inform decision-making about the presence of indicators in schools that were deemed as characteristic of an effective school. Teachers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement using a response scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Findings were reported by the percentage of respondents that disagreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, or agreed. Percentage agreement included those respondents that both agreed and strongly agreed. Conversely, percentage disagreement included those respondents that both disagreed and strongly disagreed.

I asked permission from the NB EECD to access the School Improvement Surveys and the results for the three schools involved in the study as these data were no longer public information and accessible via the school website. I reviewed all of the statements in the School Improvement Survey. Although many of them could be linked to the theoretical codes discovered in the interview data that informed my grounded theory,

I selected only those that had an explicit link to the research question, specifically those with a reference to SIPs. From the analysis of the SIPs, only one of the three schools (School B) used any statements and their corresponding data to inform what was included in their SIP. What was done with these data in relation to school improvement planning in the other schools was unknown.

I chose all five statements from the School Improvement Survey in the Common Vision, Mission and Goals category. I believed these statements linked to the theoretical code – *sense of purpose* which informed parts of my second attempt at theory formation - *If teachers know the value of a quality school improvement plan, know what to do with it,... and can monitor the SIP for its effectiveness*. I only chose one statement (#10 Table 23) from the Instructional Leadership category that I felt aligned itself with the theoretical code *sense of agency*, which in a similar fashion informed the first part of my theory as well. The other statements in this category were mostly about the role of the school administrator. I chose six of the nine statements from the Collaboration and Staff Interaction section. I felt these linked to the theoretical code *sense of interdependence* and informed the second part of my draft theory *can work interdependently*. The remaining statements were excluded from this analysis because there was no way of knowing whether they were happening as a result of the SIP and there was no link to the research question.

The following table shows the categories of the School Improvement Survey that I felt linked to the research question, the statements selected by category, and the individual school results.

Table 23. School Improvement Survey: Selected Categories, Statements and Individual School

Results

School A: 21 Responses

Category	Statement (statement #)	Response Scale		
		Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree
Common Vision, Mission and Goals	1. The school’s vision is clear.	0.0%	0.0%	100%
	2. This school has high expectations for all students.	15.0%	5.0%	80%
	3. I have been involved in the development and/or updating of the SIP.	0.0%	0.0%	100%
	4. Progress on SIP goals is monitored at least quarterly.	0.0%	0.0%	100%
	5. Attainment of the SIP goals is supported by professional learning in this school.	0.0%	4.8%	95.2%
Instructional Leadership	10. I have been involved in decisions about school-wide processes (e.g. developing our pyramid of interventions, assessment planning, setting SIP goals).	0.0%	9.5%	90.5%
Collaboration and Staff Interaction	55. In my school, I work with people who treat me with respect.	0.0%	0.0%	100%
	56. There is good communication among teachers in this school.	0.0%	4.8%	95.2%
	57. I work within a team in my school.	4.8%	4.8%	90.5%
	60. I work collaboratively with others to discuss student progress and achievement results.	4.8%	0.0%	95.2%
	62. I am involved in long-term instructional planning with colleagues.	9.5%	4.8%	85.7%
	63. I participate in cross-curricular and interdisciplinary planning with my colleagues.	5.0%	0.0%	95.0%

School B: 22 Responses

Category	Statement (statement #)	Response Scale		
		Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree
Common	1. The school’s vision is clear.	0.0%	0.0%	100%

Vision, Mission and Goals	2. This school has high expectations for all students.	0.0%	0.0%	100%
	3. I have been involved in the development and/or updating of the SIP.	0.0%	0.0%	100%
	4. Progress on SIP goals is monitored at least quarterly.	0.0%	4.5%	95.5%
	5. Attainment of the SIP goals is supported by professional learning in this school.	0.0%	0.9%	99.1%
Instructional Leadership	10. I have been involved in decisions about school-wide processes (e.g. developing our pyramid of interventions, assessment planning, setting SIP goals).	4.5%	13.6%	81.8%
Collaboration and Staff Interaction	55. In my school, I work with people who treat me with respect.	0.0%	19%	81%
	56. There is good communication among teachers in this school.	4.5%	27.3%	68.2%
	57. I work within a team in my school.	4.5%	0.0%	95.5%
	60. I work collaboratively with others to discuss student progress and achievement results.	0.0%	4.5%	95.5%
	62. I am involved in long-term instructional planning with colleagues.	4.5%	18.2%	77.3%
	63. I participate in cross-curricular and interdisciplinary planning with my colleagues.	4.5%	13.6%	81.8%

School C: 9 Responses

Category	Statement (statement #)	Response Scale		
		Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree
Common Vision, Mission and Goals	1. The school's vision is clear.	11.1%	0.0%	88.9%
	2. This school has high expectations for all students.	0.0%	0.0%	100%
	3. I have been involved in the development and/or updating of the SIP.	0.0%	0.0%	100%
	4. Progress on SIP goals is monitored at least quarterly.	0.0%	0.0%	100%

	5. Attainment of the SIP goals is supported by professional learning in this school.	0.0%	11.1%	89.1%
Instructional Leadership	10. I have been involved in decisions about school-wide processes (e.g. developing our pyramid of interventions, assessment planning, setting SIP goals).	0.0%	0.0%	100%
Collaboration and Staff Interaction	55. In my school, I work with people who treat me with respect.	0.0%	0.0%	100%
	56. There is good communication among teachers in this school.	44.4%	11.1%	44.4%
	57. I work within a team in my school.	0.0%	22.2%	77.8%
	60. I work collaboratively with others to discuss student progress and achievement results.	0.0%	11.1%	88.9%
	62. I am involved in long-term instructional planning with colleagues.	37.5%	25.0%	37.5%
	63. I participate in cross-curricular and interdisciplinary planning with my colleagues.	25.0%	12.5%	62.5%

In all three schools the percentage agreement was high for the majority of the statements selected. These results reflect positive attributes that can be directly attributed to the use of the SIP by teachers and administrators. For example, in all three schools there was 100% agreement with the statement: *I have been involved in the development and/or updating of the SIP*. Similarly, there was very high agreement with the statement: *Progress on SIP goals is monitored quarterly*. Moreover, there was very high agreement with the statement: *I have been involved in decisions about school-wide processes (e.g. developing pyramids of intervention, assessment planning, setting SIP goals)*.

The benefit of this source of data not only supported elements of the tentative theory developed at this point but also served as evidence that other forms of change

beyond student achievement occurred as a result of using the SIP in relation to the vision, mission and goals of the school, instructional leadership, as well as in the areas of collaboration and staff interaction.

School Improvement Review Reports

The final form of extant text I analyzed for this study was the School Improvement Review reports. I asked permission from the NB EECD for copies of the School Improvement Review reports for the three schools involved in the study. Having helped design the original school review process at the Department and with the experience of reviewing over 150 schools at all grade levels in the province, I was aware of the contribution this source of data could make to my study particularly in relation to the SIP and changes resulting from its use.

Once again, I reviewed the contents of the School Improvement Review report and selected sections that pertained to the research question and any of the elements of my tentative theory about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their schools.

Description of the School Improvement Review Reports

The School Improvement Review reports were organized in a similar manner for each school. The sections included in the report contain the following information:

1. Descriptors
2. Overview
3. Vision, Mission, and Goals
4. Educational Leadership
 - a) Commitment to Improvement

- b) Empowering Others
- c) Staff Performance
- 5. Instructional Practice and Curriculum
- 6. Continuous Monitoring of Progress
- 7. Learning Environment
- 8. Professional Learning
- 9. Relationships
 - a) Student Relationships
 - b) Parent Relationships
 - c) Local, Regional, and Global Relationships
 - d) Staff Relationships

At one time, the School Improvement Reviews took place on a cyclical basis every five years. The school forms an internal review team made up of administrators, a few lead teachers, and a few parents from the Parent School Support Committee. An external review team was also formed. Members included an NB EECD learning specialist, a few subject coordinators from District office, and a principal from another school representing similar grade levels. Independently, the teams review each section of the school improvement review document (described above) and rate the presence of “look fors” in the school. There were 150 “look fors” spread across the sections mentioned above. These were established over time by educators and were seen as practices that should be present in schools. The scale used to rate the presence of these “look fors” was very evident (VE), mostly evident (ME), somewhat evident (SE), and not evident (NE). When “the evidence indicates that this ‘look for’ was consistently

demonstrated, well-established and sustainable (processes, knowledge, skills, data, etc. requires for this to be in place)” (School Improvement Review, p. 1) the label *Very Evident* was used. In addition, several questions would have been considered when the ratings were used:

- Is this part of the way we do business (pervasive, routine, part of the school culture)?
- Would this survive if the leadership changed?
- Is there a process of induction for new staff members?
- Is this a school-wide approach?
- Is it consistently demonstrated by staff – or just pockets of staff, or certain groups of staff?
- Is it documented with data or artifacts?
- Would your staff be able to explain/speak to this practice? (p. 1)

Once the school improvement review document with ratings for each indicator for all sections was completed, the results were collated and comparisons were made between what the internal review team decided and what the external review team concluded. A meeting between the external and internal review teams then took place “to discuss key findings and, most importantly, to collaboratively identify areas of strength and challenge and to subsequently recommend strategies for improvement” (p. 2). Each School Improvement Review report contained recommendations for improvement. In addition, it was also noted that further discussion would be needed or “some may warrant consideration during school improvement planning for future years” (p. 3) where ratings

did not get discussed because of time or if there were discrepancies in ratings between the internal and external review teams.

Selected Categories

The following tables (Tables 24-26) were created to show the sections and corresponding statements from the School Improvement Review reports I reviewed and selected. Although links to the theoretical codes discovered in the interview data that informed secondary attempts at theory generation could be made to the majority of the sections and indicators within the School Improvement Review reports, I selected only those that had an explicit link to the research question, specifically those with a reference to SIPs. The tables were organized to show the indicators selected and the results for each school. In the case of a discrepancy in results, indicator ratings made by the External Team are labeled (E) and the Internal Team labeled (I). “An asterisk (*) denotes that a rating was moved or changed during the follow-up meeting as a result of the discussion of additional evidence” (p. 3). A + sign indicates changes in wording of the statement from 2013.

Table 24. Vision, Mission and Goals Section from the School Improvement Review Report, Corresponding Indicators Selected, Link to Theoretical Codes and Results by School

Section, Indicator, and Number	Theoretical Code	Results by School		
		A	B	C
Vision, Mission and Goals	Sense of Purpose			
1. The school has a clear vision and mission focused on meeting the needs of 21 st century learners.		ME	VE	SE
2. The school vision, mission, and school improvement goals are shared with students, staff, parents, (+the PSSC) and the community (+to ensure continuity and ownership).		ME	VE	I E
				M S E E
3. Collaborative processes are in place to regularly review the vision, mission, and school improvement plan with staff members, students and the PSSC to ensure continuity and ownership.		ME	VE	N/A
4. Staff members (+know their roles) are committed to, know		ME	VE	ME

their roles in, and work toward the realization of the school vision, mission, and goals.					
5. The School Improvement Plan is developed to achieve the school’s vision and mission.	I	E	VE	N/A	
	M	S			
	E	E			
Section, Indicator, and Number	Theoretical Code		Results by School		
Vision, Mission and Goals	Sense of Change		A	B	C
6. The School Improvement Plan is based on the review of student achievement and other data.	ME		VE	I	E
				*	S
7. The School Improvement Plan includes objectives, which are strategic, measurable, and achievable, results oriented and timely (SMART).	*			I	E
				I	E
8. The School Improvement Plan is monitored regularly to gauge progress and adjust strategies accordingly.	I	E	VE	V	M
				E	E
	M	S		V	M
	E	E		E	E

Other Findings: Vision, Mission, and Goals

Each section of the School Improvement Review report is prefaced with a rationale for its inclusion in the process. This section, Vision, Mission, and Goals identified the following:

The continuing work of successful schools is anchored in their vision, mission and goals. All improvement efforts intentionally originate from, and are linked to, these three foundational elements. Everyone throughout the school community shares a clear vision focused on the inclusion and success of every student. The school’s improvement plan is informed by data and is the vehicle for putting the mission into practice. (p. 4)

The report for School A noted that school leaders are committed to using student achievement data and the key recommendations from the School Improvement Review to create a new SIP for the next school year. The report for School B noted this school used observations and feedback from students, parents, and staff members to establish a clear mission and vision focused on meeting the needs of 21st century learners.

The report for School C noted that there was a strong focus on data at the vertical team level. The suggestion of sharing strong practices with other teams was made as well.

Table 25. School Improvement Review by Educational Leadership Section, Indicator, Link to a Theoretical Code and Results by School

Section, Indicator, and Number	Theoretical Code	Results by School		
Educational Leadership: Commitment to Improvement	Sense of Agency	A	B	C
10. The school leaders demonstrate continuous improvement through research, understanding of current pedagogy and methodology, planning, and evaluation.		ME	VE	N/A
Section, Indicator, and Number	Theoretical Code	Results by School		
Educational Leadership: Commitment to Improvement	Sense of Change	A	B	C
12. The school leaders create an atmosphere of high expectations collaboratively with teachers, staff, parents, and students (statement #59 in 2014 version).		ME	VE	ME
14. The school leaders ensure that initiatives are focused on the impact they have on student learning (statement #66 in 2014 version).		I M E	E V E	I M E
			E V E	ME
Section, Indicator, and Number	Theoretical Code	Results by School		
Educational Leadership: Staff Performance	Sense of Change	A	B	C
24. School leaders monitor the effectiveness of team practices and their impact on student learning (statement #66 in 2014 version).		ME	VE	ME

Other Findings: Educational Leadership

The rationale for the Educational Leadership section of the School Improvement Review report was described as follows:

Leaders in successful schools persistently focus on learners, their needs and subsequent teaching and assessment practices. School leaders have a commitment to strive for continuous improvement and support change management. Shared

and collaborative leadership is embedded in the culture of the school (School Improvement Review Reports, p. 6).

The report for School A noted that school leaders are working to ensure classroom and school-wide initiatives and practices are focused on improving student learning. Survey results indicated that a large majority of students feel important concepts are taught well and class time is used efficiently. This report also identified challenges for School A in relation to Educational Leadership. First, feedback from individual conversations as well as teacher perception survey results indicated that communication and shared decision-making protocols and processes should be collectively reviewed and revised. There was the perception of some staff members that decisions are influenced by a select group of staff members and this needs to be addressed. Second, observations as well as teacher, student and parent feedback indicated that classroom and school-wide practices, processes and expectations are not consistent across grade levels. The report for School B noted that there is strong leadership in this school. The knowledge and use of educational research and literature to inform improvement planning and to build capacity was noted. Consequently, there is a strong expectation from school leaders for staff members to be innovative and current in their practice and pedagogy. The report for School C noted that school leaders work diligently to ensure that regularly-scheduled walkthroughs are completed and information is used to provide ongoing feedback and support for staff members to promote ongoing professional growth.

Table 26. Professional Learning Section from the School Improvement Review Report, Corresponding Indicators Selected, Links to Theoretical Codes and Results by School

Section, Indicator, and Number	Theoretical Code	Results by School		
Professional Learning	Sense of Purpose	A	B	C
112. Staff members design, share, and work toward their professional growth plans which are aligned with their assignments and the School Improvement Plan (statement #96 in 2014 version).	I	E	VE	ME
	ME	VE		
113. Professional learning opportunities and the school’s PL Plan are aligned with the goals in the School Improvement Plan.	ME	ME	VE	N/A

Other Findings: Professional Learning

The rationale for this section, Professional Learning (PL), of the School Improvement Review report was given as follows:

High performing communities are learning communities where professional growth and a culture of inquiry are well-established. Professional development is embedded in the work of teaching, reflecting, and refining. Professional development is connected to improving student learning and is differentiated to address both school-wide and individual needs. Professional learning empowers teachers to deepen their knowledge and skills, innovate, and inspire students to reach their full potential (School Improvement Review Reports, p. 21).

The report for School A noted that staff members are actively involved in ongoing professional learning and this is encouraged by school leaders. The report for School B noted that there is a strong culture of inquiry and risk-taking in this school and ongoing professional learning to ensure classroom practices are current and support the needs of 21st century learners is strongly promoted and encouraged by school leaders. This report also

challenged staff to establish structured peer feedback and coaching opportunities in order to support ongoing professional learning and growth. The report for School C noted that professional learning opportunities focused on the use of formative classroom assessments have been pursued. The recommendation for ongoing dialogue and continued PL support to ensure that formative assessment practices are used to inform all daily lesson plans was recommended.

Discussion

Once again, the data from this form of extant text showed results characteristic of the theoretical codes proposed in the secondary attempt at theory generation. Moreover, the 14 “look fors” selected for this analysis were directly linked to the use of the SIP and were either self-evaluated (internal review team members) or peer evaluated (external review team members) as being *mostly* or *very evident*. In a similar fashion, this supported the notion that the use of the SIP, as identified previously from some of the elements of the School Improvement Surveys, resulted in changes taking place in schools that were attributed to its context.

Refinements to the Theory

Secondary attempts at theory generation based on the findings from the interviews in Chapter 4 put forth the following theory:

If teachers and administrators know the value of a quality school improvement plan, know what to do with it, can work interdependently while dealing with influences external to their work, and can monitor the SIP for its effectiveness, then change will occur in their school. Conversely, the opposite of these characteristics results in change not taking place in schools.

I felt the need to adjust the theory proposed at this point for a few reasons. First, the theory above was based on data from the interviews only. While these data informed the theoretical codes of the tentative theory, findings from the elicited responses and extant texts needed to be considered for the final version of the substantive theory about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their schools. Secondly, the *if-then* phrasing proposed is a conditional statement. That is, what follows the *if* part (*teacher and administrators knowing the value of a quality school improvement plan, know what to do with it, can work interdependently while dealing with influences external to their work, and can monitor the SIP for its effectiveness*) of the theory proposed reads that all parts must be present for the *then* part (*change to occur*) to take place. This hypothesis followed by a conclusion reads as a conditional statement. This is a problem. It is conceivable that without the use of a SIP or the conditions proposed in the *if* part of the theory, that change might occur. The theory proposed reads and would be likely to be interpreted that all conditions must be present in order for change to take place. This is also echoed in the last part of the proposed theory - *Conversely, the opposite of these characteristics results in change not taking place in schools*. This signalled that a change in the wording of the theory needed to occur.

In retrospect, the first and second attempts at theory formation were premature especially given the fact that more data needed to be analyzed. While the interview data identified five key categories (*sense of purpose, sense of agency, sense of interdependence, sense of the other as navigable, and the sense of change*) to reflect changes taking place along with five additional categories (*sense of complacency, sense*

of disillusionment, sense of isolation, sense of other as defeatist, and sense of perpetual motion) to reflect the absence or resistance of change taking place, the meanings from all sources of data used in this study along with the plethora of codes used to analyze it, the connections made among categories, and the logic of justification for the decisions made about the data were needed to generate a more complete and accurate substantive theory about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in schools.

Grounded in all data sources, this is the theory:

School improvement plans can be used as a means to make change in schools.

When teachers and administrators work towards the development of a quality school improvement plan, or when they use it for their work with students and one another, or when they work interdependently while dealing with influences external to their work, changes, especially those relating to the context of the school, can take place.

Analysis of the Theory

The final part of the data analysis framework for this study was the analysis of the theory itself. This was an important step to ensure that the theory had quality, was sensible, just, pragmatic, and had the potential to be accepted by those who chose to use it for planning purposes as they attempt to make changes in their schools or by those who might refer to for research purposes in future studies. As noted by Loh (2013):

The search for quality, or specifically the criteria with which to ensure quality, which traditionally in positivist or postpositivist paradigms meant the criteria of validity, reliability and generalisability, is essential for the research to be accepted

into the pantheon of knowledge and to be received as suitable for use in various means and ways. (p. 4)

As stated previously at the end of chapter 3 in a discussion about the verisimilitude of this study, I chose to use the criteria put forth by Piantanida et al. (2004). They conclude that since “grounded theories are understood to be heuristic, not predictive, in nature, the scientific warrants of verifiability, reliability, validity, and generalizability are not applicable criteria for evaluating the credibility of the theory” (p. 341). Instead they suggest another option:

More relevant criteria would include rigor, ethics, integrity, verite, utility, vitality and aesthetics. In other words, does the portrayal of the inquiry provide evidence that the research was conducted in a rigorous and ethical manner and does the substantive theory have a coherent conceptual integrity; does it ring true; does it offer useful insights; does it have vitality and aesthetic richness to be persuasive? (p. 341)

Although the authors only put forth these criteria for future studies and have not written extensively about them, at least in my search of the literature, I chose to use them for two reasons. First, I liked their common sense appeal and, second, I wanted to circumvent an excess amount of literature and the ostensible debate around the issues of demonstrating the quality of qualitative research juxtaposed with validity, reliability, and generalizability that are often used as yardsticks not just in qualitative studies but also their professed acceptance in quantitative research. I agree with Loh’s (2013) conclusion: “Such discussions have a tendency to descend into a series of convoluted arguments, which essentially is not particularly productive since each research study is derived from

different epistemological and ontological paradigms” (p. 1). The antecedents of this study were from a constructivist paradigm “in that all knowledge is constructed; constructed knowledge is never perfect” (Loh, 2013, p. 5). What remains clear as Polkinghorne (2007) posits, “it is the readers who make judgment about the plausibility of a knowledge claim based on the evidence and argument for the claim reported by the researcher” (p. 484).

Against this background, using the criteria put forth by Piantanida et al. (2004), the final section of this chapter discusses how I used these criteria to comment on the merit of this study and the theory that resulted. Since I could not find anything written by the authors about any of the criteria beyond the questions posed earlier, I chose to combine a few of them. I begin with a discussion on rigor as the first criteria to judge the theory put forth, then the ethics combined with the integrity of the study, followed by combining verite and vitality in the context of verisimilitude before concluding with utility, and aesthetics.

Rigor

This study generated a substantive theory about how teachers and administrators used SIPs to make change in their schools. I accomplished this by a rigorous adherence to grounded theory research methods and the establishment of a four-phase data analysis framework with each phase having one or more grounded theory coding procedures and one of three criteria of significance to make decisions about the data. Permeating each phase of data analysis were the grounded theory concepts of theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling to ensure the saturation of categories, coding techniques, constant comparative analysis, and researcher memoing. This study used an overabundance

(particularly from interviews N=27) of data for theory generation with multiple interviews (N=3) for each of the participants (N=9) not to mention repeated listenings of audio taped interviews and an endless amount of time reading and rereading interview transcripts. In addition, two other data collection methods (elicited responses and extant text analysis that included five sources of information) were used to generate the theory. Not only was a significant amount of time spent collecting and coding the data but also a tremendous amount of time was used to try to figure out what it all meant and how to make meaning from it. Ultimately, this exhaustive and rigorous work informed the generation of a theory densely linked to and grounded in data.

Charmaz (2003) notes the rigor of a grounded theory study can be evaluated using Glaser's (1978) criteria of *fit, grab, work, and modifiability*. "In grounded theory, *fit* is the extent to which concepts fit with the incidents being described" (Rich, 2012, p. 10). *Grab* refers to how a grounded theory resonates for those to whom they are relevant. "By *work*, we mean that a theory should be able to explain what happened, predict what will happen, and interpret what is happening in an area of substantive or formal inquiry" (Glaser, 1998, p. 4). *Modifiability* refers to the adaptation of a theory over time due to changing social conditions (Charmaz, 2003).

Against this background, the theory generated from this study connects to rigor as a criterion simply because it represented several of the criteria listed previously such as *fit* or the "incidents being described" (Rich, 2012, p. 10), *work* and *grab*.

Ethics and Integrity

The majority of research is required to be entrenched in ethical expectations. From the outset of this study, approval from the Research Review Board was granted and

throughout the study adhered to. The majority of appendices listed are examples of compliance to ethical standards of the university. These included letters of description asking for participant involvement, anonymity measures like the elicited response questions with no identifying information, self-addressed return envelopes that contained only return labels, examples of the analysis of either small amounts of data or complete interviews, as well as lists of codes used to demonstrate various properties, to reference a few.

As far as the integrity of the study is concerned, going back and forth through the interview data in particular, rereading the elicited responses, as well as spending significant time extrapolating information from the multiple forms of extant texts required a concerted reflective process throughout this research experience. The reflexive and constructive nature of this study speaks to its integrity. Many of the participant perspectives were different even contradictory or at variance as shown through the analysis of the properties and dimensions of the focused codes. As such, decisions about the data avoided homogeneity and were not one-sided. Instead they were used to represent and extend theoretical codes as represented in Table 21. For example, the dimension “extent of use” was used to represent data showing the opposite effect about whether something happened or not. This honest representation of the data not only informed the theoretical codes but also was used to portray the types of change beyond just those associated to student achievement. Additionally, I made every effort to make my decisions about the data clear. I used three criteria of significance to make decisions about the data as well as and portrayed the relationships I was seeing in the data using

tables. Moreover, using memo writing I practised reflexivity and incorporated my thinking into my writing using a narrative style.

This criterion connects to the theory itself. If teachers and administrators want to make change in their schools, they will face the ethical challenge to *work towards the development of a quality school improvement plan, and ensure they use it for their work with students and one another, or when they work interdependently*. The data showed that the quality of the SIPs was questionable with parts incomplete, missing data, and little evidence of alignment with district or provincial initiatives. Teachers and administrators will need to take this criterion seriously if change is to occur in their schools.

Verite, Vitality, and Verisimilitude

As previously introduced at the end of chapter 3, Creswell (2003) defines verisimilitude as “a criterion for a good literary study, in which the writing seems ‘real’ and ‘alive’, transporting the reader directly into the world of the study” (p. 250). Creswell’s definition helped me to pair verite with *real* and vitality with *alive*. Loh (2013), in a discussion about verisimilitude, advances that the study “must ‘ring true’; it must have believability” (p. 9). Blumenfeld-Jones (1995) suggest “audiences must experience a congruence with their own experiences of similar, parallel, or analogous situations” (p. 31). I can only imagine that the experiences and voices portrayed in this study are real to those that will read this research, particularly teachers and administrators. Once again, Loh (2013) concludes:

The quality of verisimilitude is important because it allows others to have a vicarious experience of being in a similar situation and thereby being able to

understand the decisions made and the emotions felt by the participants in the study. (p. 10)

Eisner (1998) deduces that verisimilitude “makes it possible for others to have access not only to our lives when our stories are about them but also to the lives of others” (p. 264).

From this perspective I began this study disclosing my interest and passion for school improvement planning along with my experience as an administrator responsible for helping to use it as a means to facilitate change. I also discussed several gaps in the review of literature with several references claiming that strategic planning was not working. This hopefully served as a backdrop to show the importance of this study, not just for me but also to the school improvement planning discourse. In addition, this study represented my voice and the voices of my participants through not just the three data collection methods used but also the three criteria of significance (individual, group, and researcher resonance) used to make decisions about the data. This helped to organize it in a way to establish verisimilitude so that the study might resonate in a way that others see as plausible and true.

The theory was written in simple terms. Its components originate from the data. The verisimilitude of the theory will resonate with teachers and administrators and if one or more of its components are initiated, changes will result.

Utility

I refer to utility as the relevance of this study. Utility is about what Loh (2013) asks: “Is this study useful? Is it relevant for use by members of the research community

or by members of the teaching community?” (p. 10). Hammersley (2004) contends that “research should be aimed at producing knowledge that contributes to the problem-solving capacities of some group of people” (p. 244). Loh (2013) concludes “It must have its use, its relevance, its utility” (p. 10). Eisner (1998) provides a few criteria to test a study’s usefulness – its “instrumental utility”. He notes that “comprehension can help us understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing.” (p. 58). He also uses anticipation, that provides descriptions and interpretations that go beyond the information given about them. Finally, he uses guide / map to highlight, explain, and provide directions the reader can take into account that “deepens and broadens our experience and helps us understand what we are looking at.” (p. 58)

The use of three data collection methods that provided a rich amount of information to be analyzed combined with coding procedures that were used with fidelity and reflective of grounded theory methodology can provide opportunities for readers to apply the findings of this study to their own varied contexts. It might also help them with their research interests by learning more about how I used various aspects of grounded methodology or as a user of the theory put forth as a means to engage them in reflecting about their own school improvement practices.

Utility, as a criterion, connects to the theory generated from this study. The theory identifies components that can lead to making changes in schools. I am hopeful that when teachers and administrators use one or more of its components parts that changes will result and a better understanding of school improvement occurs.

Aesthetics

Finally, “aesthetic richness to be persuasive” (Piantanida et al., 2004, p. 341) was used as a criterion for this study and the theory generated. I am hopeful that it influences teachers and administrators when they examine their current school improvement practices not only in relation to the design and content of their SIP but more so when looking at the types of change that take place as a result of their use of the SIP. As the findings showed, there is the potential for changes that are personal and collective expressions across school cultures, working interdependently, in organizational learning, and in finding new ways to demonstrate accountability for personal growth and student learning. Changes resulting from the use of the SIP must go beyond those related only to student achievement. Given the intricacy of making change happen in complex places like schools, the theory this study generated might be persuasive and resonate for those pursuing to make change in their schools, especially changes relating to the school’s context. In the very least, the theory might serve too as a means to capture evidence about the effects of the work that teachers and administrators do on a daily basis. These effects are not always accounted for in student achievement results.

Additionally, “aesthetic qualities create symbols and images people can connect with, offer figures with whom the readers can identify, and ground complex ideas in the everyday realities of organizational life” (Cohen et al., 2002, p. 378). Who knows how this theory might provoke aesthetic qualities that could permeate deeply entrenched school improvement planning discussions about design, processes, and content?

Once again, this criterion connects to the theory generated from this study from the perspective that teachers and administrators might use it as a scaffold when they

embark upon making changes in their school. I am hopeful that if they recognize and do something with one or more of its component parts and take action to fully realize the individual or collective potential of each of them, that they will appreciate the potential the theory has on making change in their schools.

Readers of this study are encouraged to use the theory put forth as a result of the extensive work completed to create it. By no means are the criteria exhaustive; rather, the supporting details I presented are a starting point for this novice researcher to defend his thinking and logic with the intention to comment on the verisimilitude of the theory. Others will have sage advice that will add not only to my understanding but also how I use these criteria for any future theories I develop or how I use them to judge grounded theories that I read about.

Summary

This chapter focused on the findings from the analysis of extant texts. These data sources included provincial assessment results, elicited responses, school review reports, SIPs, and school improvement surveys completed by teachers. The analysis of these data triangulated the findings from the interviews and offered support for the theoretical codes and substantive theory generated from preliminary and secondary attempts at theory formation. Most importantly, these findings supported the notion that the use of the SIP resulted in multiple forms of change attributed to the context of the school. These findings offered results that challenge the literature on the effectiveness of the SIP by going beyond only looking at if there were changes in student achievement results.

The chapter culminated with a section on refinements to the theory generated in the previous chapter and revealed the final theory about how teachers and administrators

uses SIPs to make change in their schools. A final section that discussed the analysis of the theory using five criteria ended this chapter.

Chapter 6: Key Findings, Implications and Recommendations

This chapter reviews the research question and what has been learned. It begins with a brief summary of the study by restating its purpose and epistemological perspective. It follows with a synopsis of the methods of data collection and the analysis framework used that led to the development of the theory about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their schools. Key findings are then discussed followed by possible implications resulting from this research. The chapter concludes by making recommendations directed at four primary users of SIPs and provides considerations for future research in this area. It ends with final thoughts about this study overall.

Overview and Purpose of this Study

The research was driven by the following question: *How do teachers and administrators utilize SIPs to make change in their schools?* Secondary objectives included exploring and explaining: (a) what happens to these plans after they are written, (b) if the strategies within them were implemented, and (c) what form of change took place as a result of using the SIP. A constructivist grounded theory methodology was used in this study to develop a substantive theory about what teachers and administrators do with SIPs to make change in their schools.

Introduced in chapter 4, Table 27 draws attention once again to the research question of this study and the sources of information that were analyzed to answer it.

Table 27. The relationship of the data sources to the research question

RESEARCH QUESTION (in two parts)	
<i>How do teachers use school improvement plans...</i>	<i>... to make change in their schools?</i>
Primary Sources of Data	Other Sources of Information
Interviews	Provincial Assessment Results
Elicited Responses	School Review Reports
School Improvement Plans	Teacher Perception Surveys

The study was designed according to Crotty’s (1998) knowledge framework. As he states “different ways of viewing the world shape different ways of researching the world” (p. 66). Table 28 summarizes the epistemological design of this study as introduced in the first chapter.

Table 28. Design of the study

ELEMENT	KEY FEATURE
Epistemology	Constructionism
Theoretical Perspective	Interpretivism Symbolic Interactionism
Methodology	Constructivist Grounded Theory
Methods, Techniques or Modes of Inquiry	1) Intensive Interviewing 2) Elicited Text 3) Extant Texts

Chapter 4 also identified the data analysis framework. Figure 2 below, introduces again the various coding procedures characteristic of grounded theory methodology and the criteria of significance used to make decisions about the data used during each phase of data analysis.

Constant Comparative Analyses

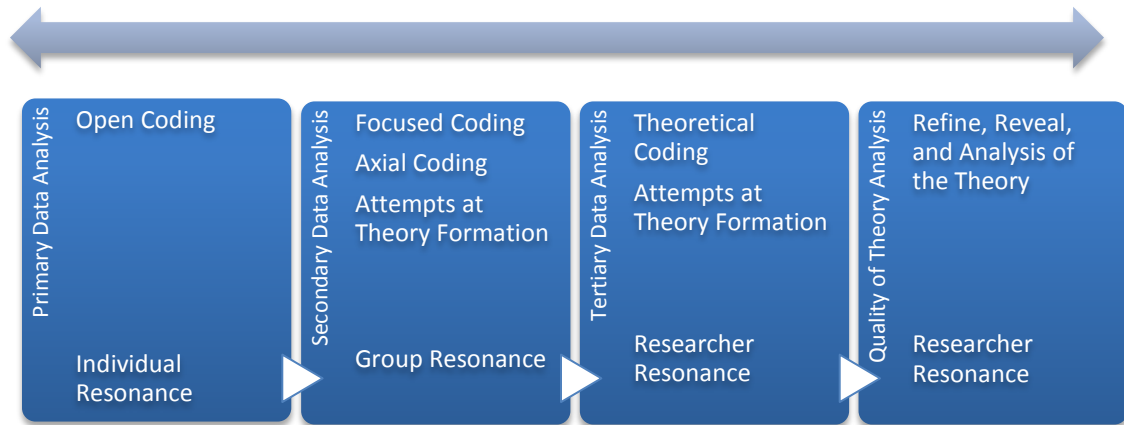


Figure 2. Data Analysis Framework

After the analysis of the interview data took place, theoretical codes were developed. These theoretical codes were then used as criteria to examine the elicited responses and several forms of extant texts. Table 29 summarizes these theoretical codes.

Table 29. Theoretical Codes and Change

Happening and Leading to Change		Not Happening and Not Leading to Change	
Theoretical Codes	What it Means	Theoretical Codes	What it Means
Sense of Agency	Knowing what to do	Sense of Complacency (Excuse)	Not knowing what to do-let it pass
Sense of Purpose	Knowing why it is important	Sense of Disillusionment	Confusion; how does it fit
Sense of Interdependence	Knowing what your responsibilities are; knowing how to help one another; keeping each other accountable	Sense of Isolation	Content to work in their classroom doing what they have always done
Sense of Other as Navigable	Knowing how to deal with the challenges that are external to the	Sense of Other as Defeatist	Too much change; can't keep up; this too shall pass attitude

	classroom		
Sense of Change	Knowing how to account for change	Sense of Perpetual Motion (Resistance to Change)	Always done this way; not concerned about change; job is to teach and cover the curriculum; keep my house in order

The theoretical codes identified above informed the development of the substantive theory about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in schools. The theory developed from the complete data set was this:

SIPs can be used as a means to make change in schools. When teachers and administrators work towards the development of a quality school improvement plan, or when they use it for their work with students and one another, or when they work interdependently while dealing with influences external to their work, changes, especially those relating to the context of the school, can take place.

Key Findings

The data from this study led to the generation of a substantive theory about how teachers and administrators utilize SIPs to make change in their schools. In addition, six key findings resulted from this study. They include: SIPs can be an exemplary practice, SIPs take time and commitment, SIPs have purpose, principals play a key role with the SIP, the effectiveness of the SIP can be determined by the changes taking place in the school, and generating a theory helps to better understand the use of SIPs.

School Improvement Plans as an Exemplary Practice

This study began by citing research that showed that most school principals and staffs see the development of an SIP as an essential part of every improvement effort within the school (Doud, 1995). It continued by referencing research by Dunaway et al.

(2012) that claimed that the SIP and its required processes are a *best practice*, describing this term using the definition offered by Bretschneider et al. (2005): “It is best when compared to any alternative course of action and that it is a practice that achieves a deliberative end” (p. 309). Based on the findings of this study, school improvement planning in the three schools examined was a best practice and achieved several changes relating to the context of the school. The study itself was not designed to predict or account for large populations in many schools. Further research could be designed and conducted particularly in both middle and high school contexts to strengthen the generalizability of this study and ultimately examine if the use of SIPs are a best practice in districts or even in provinces or larger education jurisdictions. Given the substantive theory generated from the data, the first key finding of this research is: the use of SIPs has the potential to be a *best practice* in all schools. While it is recognized there is research (Bretschneider et al., 2005) that defines *best practice*, this study also responded to the need for more research about the context of SIPs (Wikeley & Murillo, 2005). It referred to Reezigt’s (2001) claim that “the importance of the context has rarely been acknowledged and analyzed in the school improvement literature.” (p. 72) As such, SIPs as a *best practice*, by definition (Bretschneider et al., 2005), implies that a deliberative end is reached. At a glance, using Fernandez’s (2011) study that focused on the correlation between school improvement planning and student performance, the data for the three schools in this study showed that the “deliberative end” was not reached, that is, the goals relating to student achievement were not met. But that is not to say the SIPs in these schools had no positive effects. The data showed several changes that took place as a result of how teachers and administrators used SIPs in schools. Perhaps a better way to

express the first finding from this study is: the use of SIPs has the potential to be an exemplary practice. *Exemplary* simply means *servicing as an example*. Moreover, *exemplary practice* redirects the focus on any positive effects associated with the context of the school beyond those that only relate to changes in student achievement. This finding extends our knowledge of SIPs by broadening discussions relating to the effectiveness of SIPs to include changes in the contextual factors of the school that result when teachers and administrators use SIPs.

Additionally, this study responded to the observation of Dunaway et al. (2012) that “little research has been done as to whether this ‘accepted practice’ actually improves schools” (p. 158). With the premise of Fernandez (2011) that “high quality planning should help organizations of all kinds achieve their goals” (p. 339) juxtaposed with the contention that some researchers have been critical of the notion that formal planning can produce large improvements in schools and organizations (Bell, 2002), the findings from this study showed a range of changes that took place in schools as a result of using SIPs. First, when teachers and administrators knew the purpose of the SIP, especially the vision and mission of the school, the majority of discussions were about how the intended strategies aligned with the school’s purpose. As one principal stated: “We connect everything to essentially our big mission and vision which was co-created by all of the staff members here. And I think that’s been really, really important in terms of our SIP because things are now directed toward that.” Another teacher commented: “I think it is a good thing for sure. It certainly gives the school a goal for where it’s going, gives the staff a chance to reflect on what is needed.”

Secondly, the data showed a plethora of actions resulting from the use of the SIP. Categorized as *sense of agency*, some of the actions included shared decision-making, conducting pre- and post-assessments, administering several types of formative assessments, co-planning, creating rubrics, team teaching, establishing committees to set and review the goals of the SIP, and constructing writing exemplars.

A *sense of interdependence* was another change that resulted from the use of the SIP, especially by teachers. Best illustrated was in the case of flexible groupings (multi-age student groups organized according to similar reading levels) at one school. As one teacher put it, “Everybody’s kids in that group you are responsible for. So you got to do your part, you are accountable to your peers.” Another teacher captured the meaning of interdependence succinctly: “You know, there are a lot of challenges and if we don’t work together there’s no way we can do it.”

Dealing with the amount of change imposed on schools was another key theme that emerged in the data. One administrator noted:

We have to create support for the staff because one of the things that happens in education is that we get all of this, we have mandated things, we have curriculum, we have all of these things coming at us and we don’t want to continually add more, add more, add more, so we need to find ways to fit, you know we’re not trying to add more.

Referencing the SIP, one teacher made this claim:

You know at the end of the day there’s only so many working hours and we can’t make the day 28 hours long. We can’t change the length of the week. We can’t do any of that but we can control what we do during those hours. So that was kind of

my strategy to get beyond that sort of mind block about all of the changes. We can choose to do what's the most effective, or has the greatest impact during the hours that we are in fact working.

These voices reflected the notion that the SIP kept teachers focused.

Finally, both teachers and administrators were able to account for changes that took place as a result of their use of the SIP. For example, some teachers took note of increased student engagement and students taking responsibility for their learning by setting their own learning goals. As one administrator noted:

If you're a farmer and you've got an acre, you try to make sure you get the best yield out of that by using the best farming practices possible. Change happens because of how we really use high yield strategies, right? So even if we are saying there is an issue or whatever, what are the best practices?

There were also numerous comments about the use of formative assessment data to track student progress, student recognition efforts to highlight individual academic and extra-curricular achievements, school-wide initiatives like exploring mindfulness as well as monitoring efforts not only to oversee changes in student achievement but behavior as well.

From the theoretical codes generated from the data along with the examples and comments listed above, SIPs were an *exemplary* practice that achieved a variety of changes not just related to student achievement but in numerous areas related to the context of the school.

School Improvement Planning Takes Time and Commitment

Regardless of the types of changes that occurred, the data also showed the commitment and hard work of both teachers and administrators in their use of the SIP. This is another key finding of this study and will be discussed next.

Several data sources supported the notion that the school improvement planning process takes time and commitment. The findings from the interview data showed that team meetings, vertical team meetings, or professional learning community discussions were mechanisms used to discuss the SIP, particularly its implementation. The data showed that teachers and principals in some schools used SIPs to monitor the focus of what they were doing on a regular basis by reviewing how students were responding to instruction and if they were progressing. One school developed monitoring strategies to track student achievement. This took the form of assigning responsibilities to specific teachers for particular strategies as well as scheduling regular discussions at staff meetings and during school-based professional development days to monitor if the goals of the SIP were being met. A range of monitoring functions surfaced in one school in particular. These included a focus on discussing successes related to student learning and reflecting on what worked and what did not. There was an emphasis on determining if there were changes in student achievement, if there was short-term growth in one year, if movement for students below grade level but not reaching grade level expectations took place using formative assessments, if there were high levels of success in the early years, and if this success was limited to a cohort of students or spanned across grade levels. One teacher concluded: “If the flexible grouping strategy was not implemented then changes in student achievement may not have occurred.” The importance of monitoring academic

growth and asking if growth occurred was at the forefront of discussions about monitoring the success of the SIP in this school.

The school improvement survey data and school review reports also showed evidence about the time and commitment made by teachers and administrators to the SIP. In all three schools, the data showed high levels of agreement that teachers monitored the progress of the goals and the overall SIP was monitored regularly to gauge progress and adjust strategies accordingly. This data source also showed a high level of agreement with statements pertaining to the school's vision and mission. Teachers in the schools in this study agreed that their school's vision was clear and that the school had high expectations for all students. The school review data also supported this claim. Rated as *mostly evident* in all three schools was a clear vision and mission that focused on meeting the needs of learners and collaborative processes in place to share and review on a regular basis the school vision, mission, and school improvement goals with students, staff, parents, the Parent School Support Committee (PSSC), and the community to ensure continuity and ownership.

Teachers concurred that they had been involved in the development and/or updating of the SIP and participated in professional learning opportunities in their school to support the attainment of its goals. There was widespread agreement that they also had been involved in decisions about school-wide processes like setting SIP goals. The school review data showed that staff members were committed to knowing their roles and working toward the realization of the school vision, mission, and goals.

This finding, that SIPs take time and commitment, echoes the cautions of previous literature. Hambright and Diamantes reinforce this point: "if there is no internal

commitment to the plan, and no intent to implement it, strategic planning is a waste of time and energy” (p. 17). Bryson and Alston (1996) conclude that “if the organization lacks the commitment of key decision makers, to carry through an effective strategic planning process and produce a good plan, the effort should not be undertaken” (p. 6). Bryson (1995) maintains that “engaging in strategic planning when effective implementation will not follow is the organizational equivalent of the average New Year’s resolution” (p. 9). In a similar fashion, Fernandez (2011) asserts “that many organizations attempt to engage in formal planning but not many are successful in producing effective plans or there may be a disconnect between planning and the actual execution of a plan” (p. 343).

School Improvement Plans Have Purpose

The finding that SIPs have purpose supports Fernandez’s (2011) research that identified multiple purposes of the SIP that are typically linked to increasing the efficiency of the school, promoting organizational learning, or facilitating a strategic direction for the school to take. The school improvement survey data showed that teachers had high levels of agreement in how they viewed their working relationship with their colleagues. Most teachers felt that they worked with people who treated them with respect. They also felt there was good communication among teachers in their school and they worked within a team. In addition, they concurred that they worked collaboratively with others to discuss student progress and achievement results, were involved in long-term instructional planning with colleagues, and participated in cross-curricular and interdisciplinary planning activities. This reflects the notion that SIPs can be used to promote organizational learning (Fernandez, 2011).

The school review data also suggested that teachers used data to facilitate a strategic direction. They felt that the SIP was developed to achieve the school's vision and mission, was based on a review of student achievement results and forms of data, and included objectives that were strategic, measurable, achievable, results-oriented, and timely (known as SMART objectives). This finding aligned itself with several definitions of strategic planning contained in the literature review. Brown and Marshall's (1987) definition "...developing a vision of the desired future for the organization and some ways to achieve that mission..." (p. 3), or Cawelti's (1987) explanation that educational strategic planning is "a process deliberately designed to help leaders conceive of the kind of institution they would like to create to serve their students" (p. 7) are examples of this.

Principals Play a Key Role with the SIP

Another finding from this study is that principals play a key role with the SIP. The data showed the role of principals and their interplay with SIPs was congruent with change taking place in the school. One principal began the school year having "all teachers sharing their professional growth goals within the team." Teachers were allowed to keep one personal growth goal separate from the SIP, while the other two had to connect with the goals of the SIP, usually in the areas of literacy and numeracy. The SIP goals were decided collaboratively at staff meetings and the principal encouraged "starting with something positive." The data showed that one of the most talked about roles of the principal was "placing priority to discuss the SIP at every staff meeting" and "keeping the SIP 'fresh in their minds' by discussing it on a consistent basis at staff meetings, professional development sessions, in professional learning community

meetings and grade level meetings.” One teacher recognized the frequency of their principal “using a break out group format to discuss the SIP” and the focus of keeping the vision and mission of the SIP at the forefront of discussions. One principal indicated that “using their personal and professional experience to empower others and bring out their talents of the staff” was his primary role. This principal felt that “teachers don’t always see their strengths and that sometimes an administrator’s responsibility is to bring those talents out. In other words, empower teachers to give it a try... and push yourself.” This notion reiterates Bell’s (2004) recognition about “the importance of dispersed leadership or the part played by individual teachers in implementing strategies for improvement” (p. 34). Another principal used a focused question when meeting with every teacher to discuss personal professional growth goals and how they align with the school improvement goals. This principal asked teachers to “talk about what they see where they need to grow professionally” and discussed with teachers individually ways to support them in order to “bring about change.”

Fostering an atmosphere of goal setting on a regular basis both by the teachers and as a student expectation in relation to the context of the SIP was seen by another principal as his primary role. As one principal commented: “Establishing new goals after initial goals are completed, revising goals on a regular basis, connecting goals to new initiatives, and linking existing goals to new initiatives is what it is about.” The discussion about professional growth goals took this approach:

Let’s look back at your goals, were you able to accomplish what you set out to do? If so how, if not why do you think that didn’t happen? And what do you see for the future for next year going forward?

Principals themselves felt that knowing their responsibility in terms of how to support teacher growth resulted in teachers “teaching to their strengths” and “pushed them to think outside the box.” Ultimately teachers and administrators need to “know each other’s strengths.”

Another principal discussed that his job was “to be realistic as to what goes in the SIP” and “avoiding wasting teachers’ time.” Still another pointed out that his role was “to support teachers and their teaching through the SIP” and “examine what teachers are doing despite changes in provincial assessments.” One principal concluded that his role was “to decide what makes sense and what works” and keep in mind the purpose of the SIP – “know where students are at and move them to where they want them to be.” This echoes Brown and Marshall’s (1987) definition of strategic planning when they refer to strategic planning as a process that involves “developing specific plans to get the organization where it is to where it wants to be.” (p. 3) In addition, it supports McNamara’s (2003, cited by Fernandez, 2011) definition of strategic planning: “the purpose of strategic planning is to design a plan to help determine where an organization wants to go, what is needed to get there, and how will it know if it got there.” (p. 341)

In addition to the comments made above, the school review data also supported the importance of the role of the principals and how they supported teachers and the work they do with the SIP. In each of the three schools in this study, the evidence from the school review data showed that school leaders demonstrated continuous improvement through research, understanding of current pedagogy and methodology, planning, and evaluation. There was also evidence that school leaders created an atmosphere of high expectations with teachers, staff, parents, and students, monitored the effectiveness of

team practices, and ensured that initiatives were focused on the impact they had on student learning.

Effectiveness of the SIP Determined by the Changes Taking Place in the School

Monitoring the effectiveness of team practices and impacts on student learning as key roles of the principal and how they use the SIP with teachers evokes a discussion about the effectiveness of the SIP which is the next key finding of this study.

The introduction to this study pointed out the difficulty in determining whether or not SIPs make a difference or “achieve some deliberative end” (Bretschneider et al. 2005, p. 309). It referred to Fernandez’s (2011) study that focused on the correlation between school improvement planning and student achievement and his finding that “there is a strong and consistent association between the quality of school planning and overall student performance in math and reading” (p. 338), but also acknowledged his claim that the research design and method of his study was complicated and needed to “control for a variety of factors” (p. 338). Fernandez emphasized this caution:

The review of the literature on this subject suggests that the conceptualization, operationalization, and eventual measurement of strategic planning and performance are far from easy. Collecting valid and reliable data on the quality of strategic plans and level of performance of an organization is a behemoth task wrought with many obstacles. (p. 345)

In contrast to Fernandez’s (2011) research was the explicit claim by Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) that “existing research on the effectiveness of formal planning is clear: Planning is essentially unrelated to organizational performance” (p. 42). Beyond these

contradictions about whether planning works or not was more recent research that pointed to the absence of studies in relation to the effectiveness of SIPs. For example, Dunaway et al. (2012) note that “little research has been done as to whether this ‘accepted practice’ actually improves schools” (p. 158) and that the “effectiveness of a SIP has not been frequently assessed and the impact on effectiveness checks do not occur on a regular basis” (p. 160). As Anfara et al. (2006) posit, “the utility of these improvement plans for effective and meaningful school improvement remains questionable” (p. 293).

In light of this recent research, there was consensus among researchers on the need for more studies to take a closer look at the effectiveness of school improvement planning. Fernandez (2011) states that “a longitudinal study is needed to look at patterns of SIP quality across schools and their impact on academic outcomes across time” (p. 361). Wikeley and Murillo (2005) suggest the need for future studies to explore the “importance of context, the role of internal and external change agents, and the complexity and interconnectedness of all factors and influences on effective school improvement” (p. 356).

This study contributed to the school improvement planning discourse and offered findings that were different from a plethora of previous studies that suggested SIPs failed and did not impact organizational performance. Instead, this study demonstrated that the use of SIPs can not only promote organizational learning but also facilitate a strategic direction (Fernandez, 2011). The findings from this study showed the use of the SIP by teachers and administrators provided purpose, identified strategic actions and strategies, harnessed focus, and demonstrated changes in the context of the school which not only

can deepen our understanding of SIPs but also account for ways other than changes in student achievement when there is a need to assess the effectiveness of SIPs.

The data collection methods used in this study allowed teachers and administrators to use their voices to discuss their roles as change agents and shed some light on the complexity and interconnectedness of how they used the SIP to make changes in their schools. Through the data analysis framework and employing other tenets of grounded theory methodology, a theory was generated that is intended to generate a better understanding about how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their schools.

Generating a Theory to Better Understand the Use of SIPs

This incites a discussion about the grounded theory methodology used in this study and its ability to help generate a better understanding of the use of SIPs. Eisner (1991) notes that “a good qualitative study can help us understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing” (p. 58). Given the overabundance of studies that assert school improvement planning efforts have essentially failed, there was a need for this study to challenge previous research and to better understand how SIPs were used by teachers and administrators to make change in their schools. Using a constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2003, 2006), I developed a research process that allowed me into the real world of teachers and administrators. The data collection methods used along with the data analysis framework I designed ensured that the results were *grounded* in the social world of those being studied. By listening to the voices of teachers and administrators to capture their knowledge of the SIP and how they used it along with other sources of information about their schools, I

was able to analyze all data, develop categories to explain what the data meant, and develop theoretical codes and relationships among them which led to the development of a theory about how SIPs were used by teachers and administrators to make change in their schools.

The key finding here is that using grounded theory methodology can result in the generation of a theory about a phenomenon that might be puzzling to some. Not all grounded theory studies result in a theory being developed. The essential aspects of grounded theory methodology, including coding procedures and concepts such as constant comparative analysis, theoretical sensitivity, and theoretical sampling, were invaluable and resulted in a substantive theory being generated. The theory will ultimately be judged by researchers for its quality against criteria like rigor, verisimilitude, and utility, and by teachers and administrators according to whether it makes sense to them and serves a purpose for what they do on a daily basis. As such the findings of this study and the theory developed will have implications not only for current school improvement practices but also in relation to the approaches that are used to determine the effectiveness of SIPs.

Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study have the potential to lead to action, especially those pertaining to how SIPs are currently used. Teachers and administrators can use the findings of this study to reflect and act on any of the following considerations.

The theory generated from this study can be used to make SIPs an exemplary practice; that is, educators can ensure that SIPs reach their deliberative end. If teachers know what works with students in their classrooms, they can also learn more about how

to effectively use SIPs to make change in their schools. By incorporating one or more elements of the theory into their work, SIPs have the potential to reach their desired ends and be seen as an exemplary practice by teachers and administrators.

Teachers and administrators are committed to their profession. The majority of teachers have an innate desire to get better at what they do. Several teachers participate in professional learning opportunities, attend conferences, and take courses to further their education. Their willingness to grow professionally exemplifies their commitment and investment in time to make schools better. In a similar fashion, these characteristics are essential in their use of the SIP if change is to be realized. Administrators need to find ways to create time for teachers to use SIPs in their work. This means providing them with the financial resources to pursue professional development according to the goals of the SIP and the time to contemplate and discuss the strategies and actions they want to undertake, time to work together implementing new approaches, and time to reflect and monitor what they are doing.

Teachers and administrators can use the findings of this study to reacquaint themselves with their school's vision and mission. They can reflect on the purpose of their school and if their SIP captures this resolve. They can decide whether or not the goals or objectives of the SIP are aligned with the school's vision and mission and if the strategies and actions contained in the SIP will likely lead to a desired end. Most importantly, they can use the SIP as a catalyst to work closer together, to learn together, or to facilitate a strategic direction for their school.

The findings of this study serve as a reminder that the relationship that exists between the school principal and teachers in the school is an important one. Principals

can consider the findings in this study as a means to support teachers and create desirable conditions for them to use the SIP for their work with students and one another. Schools are busy places and teachers need an adequate amount of time that is not intrusive to current workloads if the focus of the SIP is to be meaningful and done on a consistent basis.

This study showed that the use of SIPs resulted in teachers having a sense of purpose, created an interdependence among staff, kept a focus amidst other external forces, and provided a means to account for changes happening both academically and in relation to what was happening in the school. This study demonstrated that the effectiveness of SIPs can be determined by accounting for changes taking place related to the context of the school, not only those related to student achievement. As such, any changes taking place in the context of the schools can be used as a means to determine the effectiveness of SIPs.

The theory itself generated from the analysis of data in this study has the potential to change current school improvement practice. Even as the school improvement planning literature continues to grow, experts know relatively little about the process in relation to how teachers and administrators interact and engage in the school improvement planning process. The significance of the theory generated in this study might instill reflection about the purpose of school improvement planning and the importance of its strategic intent. Consider the old adage: “In theory, theory and practice are the same. In practice, they are not” (Quote Investigator, n.d.). The theory generated from this study has the potential to align theory with practice and ultimately create change in schools.

Recommendations from this Study

While the implications of the findings might result in action being taken to alter current practices with SIPs, the following recommendations could influence school improvement planning discourse over the long term. The following recommendations are offered to four key groups that interact directly or indirectly with SIPs: policy makers, those involved in leadership development, teachers, and senior provincial government officials. I also offer recommendations for future research in this area.

For Policy Makers

To ensure that SIPs reach their deliberative end, I offer the following four recommendations for policy makers.

The first recommendation is that provincial, district, and school policies require that all types of improvement plans be monitored monthly to ensure the contents of the plan are being enacted and that effectiveness checks occur on a regular basis. This policy would also require a yearly report completed by those responsible for the plan that identified not only what was attempted but also what was achieved. The policy would state that these reports would be used as part of an evaluation process for those responsible for the implementation of the plan.

The second recommendation is that provincial, district, and school policies require that improvement plans are informed by multiple forms of data, not only achievement data. Other data to be considered related to the context of the school would include survey data or findings from focus group or interviews with students and teachers.

The third recommendation is that a policy be developed to establish an SIP submission date that permits flexibility to change certain components of the plan (e.g., strategies, timelines, person responsible), but not the focus until an identified process to change the focus has taken place with key stakeholders. This avoids SIPs always being in development and incomplete and also avoids shifting the focus too frequently and wasting the time and energy of administrators and teachers.

The fourth recommendation is that a policy be developed to ensure the quality of the SIP is maintained according to an identified standard or rubric. This standard would ensure the purpose of the plan is clear, that the clarity of what was written for each of the component parts is easily understood, that the component parts are aligned so that the plan not only makes sense but increases the likelihood that the goals will be achieved, and that there is evidence the SIP was co-constructed by teachers, administrators, and parents.

For Those Involved in Leadership Development

To ensure that the design of SIPs, their strategic processes, and methods to determine their effectiveness are understood, I offer the following two recommendations for those involved in leadership development.

First, I recommend that pre-service and in-service opportunities be provided for administrators and members of leadership teams to explore and learn how to write a quality SIP, understand the strategic processes required, and methods to assess its effectiveness.

The second recommendation is that principals be provided with leadership development opportunities to experiment with implementing change and conduct an action research project relating to some aspect of school improvement planning.

For Teachers

To ensure active engagement with the SIP, I offer the following two recommendations for teachers. First, I recommend that teachers new to a school be provided with background information about the SIP, the school's vision and mission, as well as current areas of focus. Second, I recommend that teachers be given time away from instructional duties to meet with colleagues to share their voice and offer input about the contents of the SIP, learn their roles and responsibilities, plan for implementation, and monitor the current status of initiatives and their effect on student learning or the context of the school.

For Senior Provincial Government Officials

To ensure that SIPs are supported, the following four recommendations are offered for senior officials at the NB EECD.

The first recommendation is that the School Review process and the administration of the School Improvement Surveys continue and that the data from these sources be used to inform decisions about the SIP.

The second recommendation is that, in the absence of providing autonomy to schools for being responsible for school improvement, the NB EECD and district offices need to define their roles and responsibilities in relation to individual SIPs if alignment with provincial and district improvement plans continues to be an expectation. Since

schools are trying to do too much, improvement efforts must be focused and manageable, and have tangible and meaningful support from district and provincial offices.

The third recommendation is that the NB EECD find innovative ways to report improvements that schools are making in a manner that reflects their context, not just achievement results. In other words, celebrate school success publicly and frequently to strengthen the mindset and culture of learning in this province. Defining student achievement to include references about academic excellence, well-being and public confidence needs to be explored further and reported on a regular basis.

The fourth recommendation is that the NB EECD recognize the importance of the SIPs and provide schools with the financial resources needed to become self-determined by allowing them to build and strengthen teacher capacities, become part of larger learning networks, and most importantly be autonomous in their decisions relating to improvement.

For Further Study

This study shows that there is more research to conduct in relation to SIPs. I offer the following five recommendations to researchers for further study.

The first recommendation is for investigations into the design of SIPs in the hope of moving from corporate business strategic planning designs to ones that make use of more easily understood professional learning community language (e.g., what do we want students to know? how do we know they know it? what happens when they do not learn it? what happens if they already know it?). Exploring alternative improvement planning designs could be fascinating and warrants further research. In particular, exploring alternative planning designs that are culturally representative e.g. First Nations, might

offer insight into a distillation process that could lead to plans being more actionable at the local level and more generally for the discipline itself.

The second recommendation is for research about strategic processes to accompany the SIP. Here is a suggested research question that is worth attention: What are the strategic processes required for a school to make effective change? More work in this area is needed.

Third, the language of improvement planning needs attention as well. As indicated in the literature review, the emergence of strategic planning originated from the business and corporate world. As such, the language of improvement planning from the business and corporate world made its way into educational strategic planning. There is exciting research waiting to be done that could not only expose the interpretation of the language used in the current designs of SIPs but also show what could replace it and the effect it might have on change taking place in schools. In addition, if this study was to be replicated, there is a plethora of literature about organizational design and change as well as job crafting that could be explored and interwoven with related research questions. In particular, the literature about job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) that discusses how people idiosyncratically modify their work to improve their well-being and performance could complement future research in this area.

The fourth recommendation is that the context of school improvement planning still needs further exploration. This study was motivated by the assertions of both Reezigt (2001) and Wikely and Murillo (2005) in their appeal for more research relating to the context of school improvement planning. While this study has shed some light on the experiences of teachers and administrators and what they do with SIPs, larger-scale

studies are needed as well as those addressing SIPs in middle and high schools.

Moreover, future studies could examine the differences between high and low performing schools or results achieved from high and low performing principals or schools teams charged with the responsibility of implementing the school improvement plan.

Finally, research using observations as a data collection method about teachers' and administrators' use of SIPs would be valuable. The observation of team meetings, professional learning community discussions, vertical and grade-level team meetings, and professional development opportunities as teachers work with their SIPs would offer new insights in relation to how teachers and administrators use SIPs to make change in their schools.

Final Thoughts

I believe in school improvement planning. I believe in teachers and administrators and recognize the demands they face daily. I know they want to help their students and make things better for their school.

I think SIPs can be the impetus for orchestrating change in schools. I hope teachers and administrators are provided more knowledge about the school improvement planning process and are given enough time not only to create quality SIPs but also to focus on their implementation. Schools are busy places and the context of education is such that teachers and administrators continue to be bombarded by changing agendas and the latest and greatest teaching technique or resource that promises significant results.

It is my hope that the theory this study has generated causes educators to refocus their approach to school improvement planning and consider what might be accomplished if one or more of the elements of the theory are acted upon in a meaningful

way. It is also my hope that the theory leads to change not just for how teachers and administrators work with their SIPs but more importantly for the students and parents they serve.

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Appendix A: Research Ethics Board Approval

Mr. Daryl Morrison

Faculty of Education

Dear Mr. Morrison,

As Chair of the Research Ethics Board at the University of New Brunswick (Fredericton), I have reviewed your revised application("How do teachers utilize school improvement plans to make changes in their schools?" -- REB 2014-070) for its compliance with Tri-Council Policy (TCP) and with UNB Policy (UPRIH). On the basis of the review, I am pleased to inform you that, in my opinion, your project now appears to be in compliance with TCP and UPRIH. Accordingly, please consider this E-mail to represent notification of REB approval of your project. Formal approval will be sent from the Office of the Vice-President (Research) in a few days.

Thank you for straightening out my confusion about Appendix A, and for re-writing the information and consent form(s) to incorporate the various modifications I had suggested. You're now informing your participants that you and Dr. Brien will have access to the data, explaining about the written responses requested, and clarifying that the interviews will be arranged to be off school property. I've printed the modified versions and added them to your file. I should clarify that the REB doesn't require researchers to obtain the approval of school administrators merely to interview teachers or principles about their work, if the interviews are taking place away from school and outside work hours. In this project, however, you are asking the cooperation of the school administration in allowing you to meet with staff, collect materials etc., so that their approval and consent will be required. Please send me copies of that consent when you eventually obtain it.

Please note that, in the future, if you find that you must make any changes to your protocol, any such changes must be considered and approved by the REB before they are implemented.

If any funds for this research project are held until REB approval you will have to inform the Office of Research Services at UNB of this approval in order to release your funds.

If you have not already done so, please send an e-mail copy of your project summary (your answer to question # 1 of the ethics application form) to ethics@unb.ca as soon as possible. Thank you for your co-operation in this matter.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research project.

Steven Turner, Chair

UNBF Research Ethics Board

Appendix B: Consent Form-Superintendent

School Improvement Planning Research Study

Daryl Morrison

REB #2014-070

Steven Turner, Chair

UNBF Research Ethics Board

August 15th, 2014

Dear Steven Turner:

I met with Daryl Morrison and he provided me with an overview of his research study for his PhD. I am aware that he will be completing three forms of data collection with some administrators and teachers within Anglophone School District West. These include interviews, elicited responses, and a review of school improvement plans.

I am aware that this research project has been approved by the Research Ethics Board (REB #2014-070).

As Superintendent of Anglophone School District-West I approve of this research study and give Mr. Morrison permission to meet with school principals and teachers.

Sincerely,

David McTimoney

Superintendent

Anglophone School District-West

Appendix C: Letter of Description and Consent Form-Administrator

Dear school administrator:

I am a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick. This letter describes a research project intended to explore how teachers use school improvement plans to make change in their schools. A key component of this research study is to obtain information from school administrators about how teachers use school improvement plans to make change in their schools. This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick and is on file as REB 2014-070. It has been reviewed and discussed with the Superintendent.

I would like to invite you to participate in interviews about school improvement planning. The length of the initial interview will be approximately 45 minutes. There might be a need for subsequent interviews. These are expected to last for 45 minutes as well. Interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed for further detailed analysis. In addition, as a participant you will be asked to respond in written form to two questions. These include:

- a) How do teachers use the school improvement plan in their work at this school?
- b) Does the use of the school improvement plan result in making a change in this school? If so, please describe the change.

Interviews will take place in your school at a mutually agreed upon time and location. Written responses will be mailed to me using a prepaid postage envelope and will be completed after the interview process is completed.

All responses will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. Your identity and school will not be identified in my dissertation. Responses will not be made available to school/district personnel or other individuals. All data will be analyzed and then stored in a locked office at the University of New Brunswick. My PhD supervisor, Dr. Ken Brien and I will be the only people with access to the data. All data will be destroyed at the end of the project. There are no identified risks associated with participation in this project.

If you agree to participate now, but later have a change of mind, you may withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation in this project is greatly appreciated. However, there is no penalty of any kind if you do not participate. If you decide to participate in the interview, you may also decline to answer specific questions if you choose. At the close of this project, a summary of the key outcomes associated with this research endeavour will be available to you.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact me at daryl.morrison@nb.aibn.com or my supervisor Dr. Ken Brien (kbrien1@unb.ca) at the

University of New Brunswick at (506) 452-6213. If you have any concerns regarding this research project and wish to speak to someone other than the researcher, please call collect to Dr. David Wagner, Associate Dean of Education (UNB) at dwagner@unb.ca .

Sincerely,

Daryl Morrison

Consent for Participation

I have received the letter explaining the purpose of the School Improvement Planning research study. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that my identity will be kept confidential. I am also aware that I may withdraw from the study without penalty at any time. I can refuse to answer any questions or stop the meeting at any time.

____ I agree to participate in this research study.

Name: _____

(please print)

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Letter of Description and Consent Form-Teacher

Dear teacher:

I am a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick. This letter describes a research project intended to explore how you use school improvement plans to make change at your school. A key component of this research study is to obtain information from teachers who have had direct experience with school improvement planning. This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board at the University of New Brunswick and is on file as REB 2014-070. It has been reviewed and discussed with the Superintendent and Principal.

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project. To begin with, I would ask for your participation in interviews about school improvement planning. The length of the initial interview will be approximately 45 minutes. There might be a need for subsequent interviews. These are expected to last for 45 minutes as well. These interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed for detailed analysis. In addition, you will be asked to respond in written form to two questions. These include:

- a) How do you use the school improvement plan in the work you do?
- b) Does the use of the school improvement plan result in making a change in your school? If so, please describe the change.

Interviews will take place outside of school at a mutually agreed upon location so that you might feel more free to speak about the research topic. Written responses will be mailed to me using a prepaid postage envelope and will be completed after the interview process is completed.

All responses will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. Your identity and school will not be identified in my dissertation. Responses will not be made available to school personnel or other individuals. All data will be analyzed and then stored in a locked office at the University of New Brunswick. My PhD supervisor, Dr. Ken Brien and I will be the only people with access to the data. All data will be destroyed at the end of the project. There are no identified risks associated with participation in this project.

If you agree to participate now, but later have a change of mind, you may withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation in this project is greatly appreciated. However, there is no penalty of any kind if you do not participate. If you decide to participate in interviews, you may also decline to answer specific questions if you choose. At the close of this project, a summary of the key outcomes associated with this research endeavour will be available to you.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact me at daryl.morrison@nb.aibn.com or my supervisor Dr. Ken Brien (kbrien1@unb.ca) at the University of New Brunswick at (506) 452-6213. If you have any concerns regarding this research project and wish to speak to someone other than the researcher, please call collect to Dr. David Wagner, Associate Dean of Education (UNB) at dwagner@unb.ca .

Sincerely,

Daryl Morrison

Consent for Participation

I have received the letter explaining the purpose of the School Improvement Planning research study. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that my identity will be kept confidential. I am also aware that I may withdraw from the study without penalty at any time. I can refuse to answer any questions or stop the meeting at any time.

____ I agree to participate in this project.

Name: _____

(please print)

Signature: _____

Date: _____

School: _____

Email: _____

Appendix E: Return Self-Addressed Envelope

APPENDIX E

Daryl Morrison
PO Box 201 Station A
Fredericton, NB
E3B 4Y9

Appendix F: Screening Questions for Eligibility

Are you aware that your school has a School Improvement Plan?	YES	NO
Are you familiar with what is written in the School Improvement Plan?	YES	NO
Have you participated in the writing of the School Improvement Plan?	YES	NO
Have you participated in meetings about the School Improvement Plan?	YES	NO

Appendix G: Initial Email Sent to Principals

Page 1 of 2

Daryl Morrison

Appendix G

From: Daryl Morrison [daryl.morrison@nb.aibn.com]
Sent: September-25-14 11:51 AM
To: [REDACTED]@nbed.nb.ca
Subject: Invitation to participate in a research study-Daryl Morrison

Dear [REDACTED]:

My name is Daryl Morrison and I am a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick. I am writing you to ask if you and the staff at your school would be interested in participating in a study that I am conducting about school improvement planning. Specifically, I want to explore how teachers use school improvement plans to make change in their schools.

This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick and is on file as REB 2014-070. It has been reviewed by the Superintendent of Anglophone School District [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] has given me permission to approach you about participating in the study. If you agree, all responses will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. Your identity and school will not be identified in my dissertation. Responses will not be made available to school/district personnel or other individuals. All data will be analyzed and then stored in a locked office at the University of New Brunswick. My PhD supervisor, Dr. Ken Brien and I will be the only people with access to the data. All data will be destroyed at the end of the project. There are no identified risks associated with participation in this project. If you agree to participate now, but later have a change of mind, you may withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation in this project is greatly appreciated. However, there is no penalty of any kind if you do not participate. If you decide to participate in the interview, you and the teachers that decide to participate may also decline to answer specific questions if you choose. At the close of this project, a summary of the key outcomes associated with this research endeavour can be made available to you.

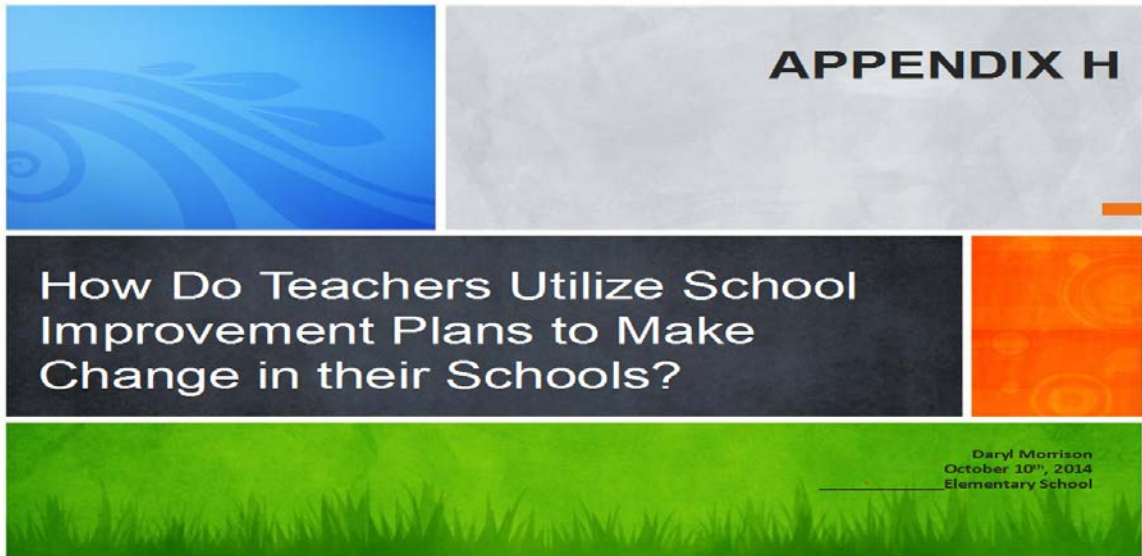
What is involved?

- 1) Seek your permission to participate in the study via this email.
- 2) Meet with you to provide an overview of the project, expected timelines, possible approaches with the staff.
- 3) Begin the interview process with you and interested teachers.
 - The length of the initial interview will be approximately 45 minutes (or less). There might be a need for subsequent interviews. These are expected to last for 45 minutes as well. Interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed for further detailed analysis. In addition, as a participant you and the teachers who choose to participate will be asked to respond in written form to two questions. These include:
 - a) How do teachers use the school improvement plan in their work at this school?
 - b) Does the use of the school improvement plan result in making a change in this school? If so, please describe the change.
 - Interviews will take place in your school at a mutually agreed upon time and location. Written responses will be mailed to me using a prepaid postage envelope and will be completed after the interview process is completed.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact me at daryl.morrison@nb.aibn.com or my

15/06/2015

Appendix H: Staff Meeting Presentation



APPENDIX H

How Do Teachers Utilize School Improvement Plans to Make Change in their Schools?

Daryl Morrison
October 10th, 2014
Elementary School

The slide features a blue abstract graphic on the top left, a grey background for the title, a black background for the main question, and an orange abstract graphic on the right. A green grass border is at the bottom.

Overview of Presentation



Appendix I: Interview Lead Questions

OPENER:

As you are aware I am interested in learning about what you do with the school improvement plan (SIP) in your school and if it leads to change.

Maybe we can begin by talking about...

- how you use the school improvement plan in your work at this school?
- if the school improvement plan is discussed on a regular basis?
- if there is a defined process for school improvement planning?
- who has ownership of the process and content of the SIP?
- how improvement strategies contained in the SIP are decided upon?
- if the SIP meets district or central office expectations re. standards, themes like technology or inclusion, or other top down demands?
- the processes used to monitor the implementation of the SIP?
- what changes in your school occurred as a result of the implementation of the SIP?
- if there is an expectation of alignment in planning between this school, district office and the Department of Education?
- what the role is of central and district offices in relation to the school improvement plan?
- if the strategies or actions in the school improvement plan contribute to the school's attainment of its improvement goals?
- if those responsible for improvement strategies contained in the plan impact change? if so, how?
- how do you and your colleagues feel about the efficacy of the school improvement planning process? does it work, especially at it relates to student achievement, school culture, or teacher and administrator professional growth?
- the extent that immersion and non-immersion teachers are included in the school improvement planning process given that New Brunswick schools have immersion programs
- how improvement strategies are negotiated in a dual language instruction school?
- if the school improvement planning process fosters teacher self-efficacy, empowerment, or shared leadership?

Appendix J: Elicited Response-Teacher

Dear teacher:

Thanks again for participating in my study about school improvement. I am in the process of writing my findings. Another form of data collection is asking participants to respond in writing to a few questions. This is known as “an elicited response”. It gives participants another chance to respond in an anonymous way after having time to reflect on the conversations captured in the interview process. I would really appreciate your involvement.

Enclosed are two sheets of paper each containing a question at the top of the page. The questions are:

- a) How do you use the school improvement plan in the work you do?
- b) Does the use of the school improvement plan result in making a change in your school? If so, please describe the change.

These are the same questions that we discussed in my interview(s) with you. Your response is anonymous and confidential.

Please take the time to respond to each question and send them back to me using the self addressed envelop provided.

Your input is valuable and appreciated! Again thank you for taking the time to help me!

Daryl Morrison

Appendix K: Elicited Response- School Administrator

Dear school administrator:

Thanks again for participating in my study about school improvement. I am in the process of writing my findings. Another form of data collection is asking participants to respond in writing to a few questions. This is known as “an elicited response”. It gives participants another chance to respond in an anonymous way after having time to reflect on the conversations captured in the interview process. I would really appreciate your involvement.

Enclosed are two sheets of paper each containing a question at the top of the page. The questions are:

- a) How do teachers use the school improvement plan in the work they do?
- b) Does the use of the school improvement plan result in making a change in your school? If so, please describe the change.

These are the same questions that we discussed in my interview(s) with you. Your response is anonymous and confidential.

Please take the time to respond to each question and send them back to me using the self addressed envelop provided.

Your input is valuable and appreciated! Again thank you for taking the time to help me!

Daryl Morrison

Appendix L: Standard Questions for Consistent Format of Coding

- What is happening in the data?
- What does the action in the data represent?
- Is the conceptual label or code part of the participant's vocabulary?
- In what context is the code/action used?
- Is the code related to another code?
- Is the code encompassed by a broader code?
- Are there codes that reflect similar patterns?

Choivitti, R.F., & Piran, N. (2003). Rigour and grounded theory research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 44(4): 427-435.

Appendix M: Example of Interview and Open Codes

195	BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW 0021		
196			
197	D:	November thirteenth. Good morning.	
198			
199	C:	Good morning.	
200			
201	D:	Okay, so what we want to talk about today is what gets done from your perspective with the school improvement plan, both as through the eyes of [REDACTED] and most importantly the eyes of a [REDACTED] because that is what my central question is about: how teachers utilize these plans to make change. So specifically the question is today, let's explore some of the structures at place, if I can use that word, but what happens at the school with the SIP? And you can you can follow that lead however you want.	Setting the task;
202			
203	C:	okay, so I guess I mean improvements like we do look at our staff meetings, we do look at it at PDs and we look at those strategies and we build on them. From the role of a [REDACTED] in using the school improvement plan, trying to encourage staff to implement some of the strategies or the indicators that we're using, looking to see if they're being used. From other things, structures that are in place for it I know like we try and look at it during our PLC time, working in our grade level teams.	Using SIP at staff meetings and PD sessions to look at strategies; Encouraging staff to use the strategies with the SIP; Using PLCs and grade level meetings to work on SIP;
204			
205	D:	Can we just, can I interrupt you there?	
206			
207	C:	Yup.	
208			
209	D:	Can you describe what that might look like?	Describing what grade level meetings/PLC look like?
210			

211	C:	What it might look like? So as a kindergarten teacher I would meet with the other two kindergarten teachers, we look at what are we doing the upcoming week so I guess in kindergarten, what phonological sounds are you covering? What are you doing in writing? What site words are you doing? What other literacy based? What are you covering in math? When do we want to have assessments done? What kind of assessments are we doing? And then what are we doing with them? We also may sit down and say “okay, what students are struggling and what are we doing to meet their needs or how can we put things in place or what have you done in your classroom with the students that aren’t getting a certain concept?” and we do that once a week, usually Wednesday afternoons, for the K team or we try to do it once a week. Oftentimes other things complicate it but	Meeting with other teachers to see what will take place over the next week; Discussing what is happening broadly in literacy and numeracy; Discussing struggling students; Attempting to meet once a week; Acknowledging that other things get in the way of meetings;
212			
213	D:	Those things that you describe, that you just described that typically takes place, are they part of anything that is written in the school improvement plan or	Trying to confirm if these structures (grade level meetings\PLC) or strategies are written in SIP?
214			
215	C:	it is.	Confirming they are;
216			
217	D:	Can you give me an example of what that could be?	
218			

219	C:	We've written, well, in our current school improvement plan, the givens which are per grade level, teacher-created givens. So what is expected at each grade level, so in kindergarten, what's expected? So we're expected to be using Jollyphonics we're expected to be using certain programs. We're expected to be doing certain assessments. And so when we sat down as a grade level team, as part of what we're going to do, "okay, this is what we expect to see this year in kindergarten" and every single classroom. So we created this list of givens and so we kind of sit down and look at that. Also, part of our school improvement plan we looked at assessment. So how are you assessing for learning? And then, what are you doing with it? What strategies are you doing to help improve in areas?	Knowing the SIP contains grade level expectations; Expectations lead to consistency; Asking questions to teachers about the strategies in the SIP and seeking information about how they are dealing with the strategies in their classrooms;
220			
221	D:	And would that be done typically every Wednesday or	
222			
223	C:	Well we try. Try is the key word. It's very difficult because oftentimes there is PDs Wednesday afternoons, meetings on students but we do try and	
224			
225	D:	But it doesn't happen once a block, it happens once a week?	Establishing how often;
226			
227	C:	Oh no, it's probably every week as much as possible, yeah.	Meeting on a weekly basis
228			
229	D:	And is the school improvement plan actually pulled out during those discussions an you kind of look at the strategies like the givens or the assessment or do you guys just know this to do this or how does that work?	Trying to clarify the use of the SIP;
230			
231	C:	Well, it's not pulled out, no, not at all but it is a known. We know that okay, this is, we know the givens, we know the list of what we want to be covering. We know that assessment is one, we know that we always want to improve on literacy and numeracy so	Acknowledging that the SIP is not pulled out but the strategies are known and discussed; Knowing the broad themes;

232			
233	D:	How do you know that?	
234			
235	C:	When we are going over the school improvement plan I guess in staff meetings or PD.	Knowing the broad themes because they are often discussed at staff meetings or in PD sessions;
236			
237	D:	So it's just entrenched in the whole discussion that this is what the school is about, this is what the K teachers are responsible for and	Summarizing
238			
239	C:	And we talk about the structure of those meetings because that's important too, when you sit down as a team. So as part of PD or whatnot we've talked about "okay what should be done during those meetings to improve learning."	Focusing on learning;
240			
241	D:	Right and this falls sort of in line with what's contained in the school improvement plan.	
242			
243	C:	Right.	
244			
245	D:	So stepping away from the PLC, what else do you see happening that the SIP, with teachers in your school? How do they use it?	Seeking more information;
246			

247	C:	I think they take those strategies, some will take the strategies and implement them but I think a lot of it is buy-in. those teachers when we put in strategies and we put ideas in place to meet the goal of our improvement plan. So if our goal is to increase literacy and one strategy or to increase learning, one strategy we have right now is using learning targets. So those to be posted in classrooms and in I Can statements. So some teachers that truly believe that this is effective and have bought into that strategy have it posted. There is still a few that you are still encouraging and we've gone over it in PD. We've gone over it in staff meetings. We've given the research but you mean it's still, you see teachers implement various strategies from the school improvement plan but not all most of the time. I mean it's still getting them to take that ownership.	Using strategies in SIP (by some); Implementing strategies; Acknowledging the importance of buy-in; Acknowledging that not all buy-in to the strategy and need further encouragement; Reinforcing the importance of these strategies at PD sessions and staff meetings along with providing teachers the research behind the strategies; Knowing that all teachers do not comply; Needing ALL teachers to take ownership;
248			
249	D:	And in your view [REDACTED], the ownership is easier if they have buy-in from the outset.	Making sense of the link between ownership/buy-in;
250			
251	C:	Absolutely. I mean, the goals will be like if, the teachers have more say if they feel that "okay, no, that idea is great" and they believe it's going to work and maybe they've experienced it or seen it. Once they have that buy in you'll see a lot more implemented.	Teachers having more say; Believing its going to work; Experiencing an seeing it work; Having buy-in equates to seeing strategies being implemented;
252			
253	D:	What about those, what about those that don't have the buy in or those that are the quiet, silent resisters or	Seeking clarification on those not buying in;
254			
255	C:	Yeah, what about them?	
256			

257	D:	What about them? How, are yeah, how's	
258			
259	C:	How do you get them on board?	
260			
261	D:	Yeah	
262			
263	C:	I think that's a big question. We'd move along, I mean sometimes we do try like peer coaching but like helping each other out, giving examples of what's worked, you help through meeting in your grade level teams that "yeah, we did this today and I had my I Can statement posted." So you hope that through the influence of PD and through the influence of fellow teachers that eventually they would take some ownership and buy in but yeah, there is some that won't.	Moving along even with those not buying in; Using peer coaching to support each other; Helping each other out, giving examples of what's worked; Help through meeting in your grade level teams; Hoping that through PD and teachers helping teachers that change will occur; Acknowledging that there is not total buy-in;
264			
265	D:	And I think you'll always have that.	
266			
267	C:	Absolutely. They'll dig in their heels and say "no thanks!"	Being realistic;
268			
269	D:	Let's go to another context, the idea of the staff meeting as a mechanism or a means to talk about the SIP. Can you talk about what your experience has been, what you've seen? Not just here or maybe here or whatever you want to deal with that.	Discussing the staff meeting as a mechanism to discuss the SIP;
270			

271	C:	Yeah, I think one thing that we do here is there is times that we will be asked to bring the school improvement plan to staff meeting and as part of it we may analyze goal one: what strategies are there? What have you done this year so far to meet this goal? What else could we add to it? Is there any other strategies we could add to it? Is there something that we need to look at and we need to do? So if there was on there, we wanted to make an example of last year's school improvement plan was having math like an everyday thing and making the kids more aware so okay, we need to put that in place. So we had to put in an activity we put on our school announcements one day a week for about ten days to make it. So just looking and okay this is the timelines, are we on timeline? Do we need to extend it? Have we met that goal? Have we met this?	Bringing SIP to staff meeting to discuss improvement strategies; Using SIP to analyze a goal in the SIP; Asking key questions about strategies and what got done with them? Monitoring strategies; Asking questions about the effectiveness of these strategies; Monitoring timelines;
272			
273	D:	Who leads those discussions? How does that, what does that look like?	
274			
275	C:	It's often led by [REDACTED] who leads the staff meeting and then we will break out into groups so we might just either work with your elbow partner or the four people around you and quickly discuss and then come back together.	Discussing Sip led by the principal (whole group); Using break out group format to discuss the SIP;
276			
277	D:	Okay, the last question I have for you, I think, is within a school improvement plan there is probably evidence, because I haven't looked at it, but I assume from the sounds of it there are different names there in terms of responsibility for monitoring. So it might say [REDACTED] is attached to strategy four or something like that and Jeanie has number one or another teacher. What does that look like? In terms of that responsibility, how does that responsibility come alive or what's done with that responsibility? Are you, first of all, do you have responsibility for the school improvement plan?	Seeking information about the responsibility for the strategies in the SIP and if this responsibility is shared;
278			
279	C:	I do. Yeah as classroom teacher. So oftentimes I	
280			
281	D:	Yeah, let's talk about that then.	

282			
283	C:	We see, okay, if we're implementing the I Can statements again for targeted learning,	Assigning responsibility to a strategy to see if it was implemented;
284			
285	D:	That's your job.	
286			
287	C:	It's my job as a classroom teacher to make sure that those I Can statements are posted. So, oftentimes we've put that ownership back on the teachers. So okay, so as part of your responsibility is you need to do this because they need to be posted.	Knowing my role; knowing my responsibility; Placing ownership of the responsibilities to all teachers;
288			
289	D:	Do you have lead responsibility for any of the strategies in the school improvement plan?	Seeking information to see if there is an identified lead;
290			
291	C:	No.	
292			
293	D:	No. Whose responsibility is that?	
294			
295	C:	To have lead? I think it's a group.	
296			
297	D:	It just is all teachers.	
298			
299	C:	All teachers.	Identifying the responsibility for what is in the school improvement plan lies with ALL teachers;
300			
301	D:	All teachers. Okay.	
302			

303	C:	So we lead together and there is times, I mean there is one where we have, are looking at our growth goals and monitoring our growth goals and the lead there is Jeanie. So [REDACTED] is responsible to make sure to touch base with teachers and see. Yeah, another one we're doing for, I guess it's not, it would be having like resource and guidance are responsible for helping in areas and music and Phys Ed. So, oftentimes it's more as a school as a whole and there are times that students are responsible for some of the goals and helping move forward.	Leading together; Primary responsibility for TPG is principal; Sharing responsibility with other staff for other staff; Student responsibility for learning;
304			
305	D:	Right, because that is a focus, self-assessment is a focus.	
306			
307	C:	Self-assessment is a focus, yeah.	
308			
309	D:	Good. Thank you. We're going to stop there for today.	
310			
311	C:	Okay	
312			
313	D:	Great	
314			
315	END OF 0021		

Appendix N: List of Variation of Focused Codes

1.00	Accountability
2.00	Agency
2.01	Agency-accountability
2.02	Agency-aligning goals
2.03	Agency-alignment of goals (TPGG with SIP)
2.04	Agency-assigning responsibility for strategies in the SIP
2.05	Agency-creating the SIP
2.06	Agency-defining roles
2.07	Agency-determining focus
2.08	Agency-determining focus/foci
2.09	Agency-determining PD needs
2.10	Agency-discussing improvement strategies
2.11	Agency-discussing SIP
2.12	Agency-discussion-decision making
2.13	Agency-engagement-seeking input
2.14	Agency-engagement-using committee structure
2.15	Agency-focus discussion on goals
2.16	Agency-focused discussions-making decision
2.17	Agency-goals aligned with school vision, school mission
2.18	Agency-implementation
2.19	Agency-making decisions
2.20	Agency-no exposure
2.21	Agency-purpose-confirming actions contained in SIP
2.22	Agency-purpose-SER
2.23	Agency-purpose-Teacher Evaluation
2.24	Agency-reviewing purpose
2.25	Agency-setting goals

2.26	Agency-sharing
2.27	Agency-sharing information
2.28	Agency-SIP discussed frequently
2.29	Agency-student responsibility
2.30	Agency-teacher responsibility
2.31	Agency-timelines
2.32	Agency-using experience from previous SIP
2.33	Agency-using school leadership to learn
3.00	Conflict
4.00	Context
4.01	Context-always changing
4.02	Context-characteristics of desired SIP
4.03	Context-creating the SIP
4.04	Context-determining goals
4.05	Context-discussion with teachers
4.06	Context-discussions with principal
4.07	Context-discussions with principal and staff
4.08	Context-doing other things not contained in the SIP
4.09	Context-exposure to SIP
4.10	Context-is SIP making change?
4.11	Context-keeping SIP consistent
4.12	Context-no exposure to SIP
4.13	Context-other influences
4.14	Context-other things happening not in the SIP
4.15	Context-principal's role
4.16	Context-purpose linked to SIP
4.17	Context-setting goals
4.18	Context-SIP evolving
4.19	Context-SIP making change

4.20	Context-the need for buying in to the SIP
4.21	Context-timeline of plans
4.22	Context-timelines
4.23	Context-using PD days, staff and team meetings
4.24	Context-valuing teacher's role
4.25	Context-wanting autonomy
5.00	Engagement-using committee structure
6.00	Expectations
6.01	Expectations-implementation of goals
6.02	Expectations-alignment-goals (TPGG/SIP/DIP)
6.03	Expectations-consistency
7.00	Expectations-how specialist teachers fit into SIP
8.00	Focus-alignment; relevance
9.00	Having issues with SIP process
9.01	Monitoring
9.02	Monitoring student success
9.03	Monitoring student success-not consistent
9.04	Monitoring the SIP
10.00	Monitoring what is happening (principal walkthroughs)
10.01	Narrative
10.02	Narrative-experience with planning
10.03	Narrative-having consistency in planning
10.04	Narrative-interest in SIP
10.05	Narrative-questioning the expectation of alignment
10.06	Narrative-questioning the relevance of the SIP
10.07	Narrative-setting goals
11.00	Narrative-setting goals and sustaining them
12.00	Networking across grade levels
13.00	Networking-amongst staff

13.01	Networks-teachers meeting to plan
13.02	Networks-teachers working and planning together
14.00	Networks-teachers working together across grade levels
14.01	Power
14.02	Power-being told to do SIP
14.03	Power-limited autonomy
15.00	Power-reverse alignment-top down
16.00	Recognizing differences
17.00	Seeking engagement
18.00	Using data to inform SIP
19.00	Using data to plan for students

Appendix O: Remaining Interviews

Theoretical Codes Leading to Change

The following five theoretical codes supported the notion that change occurred as a result of using the school improvement plan. I selected several quotes from the remaining interviews to support these theoretical codes and demonstrate theoretical saturation was achieved as no new themes emerged.

Sense of Agency

The data from the first four participants and their interviews (N=12) in this study showed that a variety of actions resulted from the use of school improvement plans. The remaining interviews (N=15) were reviewed and the following quotes were selected to reinforce the theoretical code - *sense of agency*. Numerous examples of actions are reflected in the quotes that follow.

When we make decisions we try to connect whatever decision we make to our school improvement plan but I would say the reality for teachers in the classroom is that how it shakes down to be at the micro level, how they are going to take an issue and to authentically apply it to their teaching day in and day out (S-B, P-5, R-23, I-0028).

There is a constant or ongoing pre and post-assessments, constant and ongoing formative assessments. So the teachers are always talking about how kids are doing in regard to their potential (S-B, P-5, R-35, I-0028).

So what we try to do in that committee is establish some practices, some graphic organizers and say “this is what this looks like for K, this is what it looks like for grade 1 and 2 and this is how it could look for you” (S-B, P-6, R-131, I-0035).

Yes, so the co-planning, the co-creating, right, the conferencing and the continual support. That’s how we bring the strategies to life (S-B, P-6, R-151, 155, I-0035).

So there are all kinds of things we need to tweak. Pre and post-assessments we need to tweak. This year we developed a continuum so we can place every

child after an assessment on a continuum and see exactly where the gaps are (S-B, P-6, R-251, I-0035).

So they all go on a three to five continuum of learning for every strand of Math and then we can see this is where the school is, without the provincial assessments anymore it's really hard for us to gauge as a school how we're doing. So this is what we use. We've created our own tools (S-B, P-6, R-251, I-0035).

Still, other interviews revealed a particular program that was set in place to help teachers utilize the school improvement plan. One principal commented:

We have developed a leadership program in this school (S-B, P-5, R-59, I-0028).

and went on to explain the reliance placed on teachers taking a leadership role for strategies contained in the school improvement plan.

They have to become an expert in understanding leadership generically and understand a particular topic or issue that they want to change and then after that we have a criteria for rubrics for saying this is what you agreed would be the change and the people get a certificate based on whether they will make this happen in the school improvement plan, somebody has to know how to make it work (S-B, P-5, R-71, I-0028).

Another principal reflected on previous experience and the importance of the leadership team at that school with the work they did with the school improvement plan.

They worked really well together as a team. They had a school leadership team there. They developed ideas, they came up with ideas, they researched the ideas and they implemented them. It was very successful (S-C, P-7, R-621, I-0036).

Another principal commented on other options used to bring attention to the school improvement plan.

At staff meetings, we get professional development meetings, it's continuous (S-B, P-6, R-79, I-0035).

In addition, a committee structure in this school was established to create the school improvement plan as noted by this comment.

A committee was formed around that SIP goal. So we decided that we have to figure out, so what do we need to do? What are the steps that we need to do to make sure that this is affecting student learning. So that's what we did. We formed a committee of people who were interested in developing that, the ideas (S-B, P-6, R-95, 99, I-0035).

Vertical teams were established in the school to utilize the school improvement plan.

We call it vertical because the traditional team meetings in the school are with the teachers in a cluster. For example, your primary, your elementary or your middle school teachers (S-C, P-7, R-203, I-0033).

The principal explained that the vertical teams were teachers from at least one team e.g. primary, upper elementary, and middle, that has come together to determine how to put into practice a strategy contained in the school improvement plan. This principal summarized their efforts:

Okay so that's basically the goal of either vertical team is to promote literacy and numeracy within the building and it can be everything from well little contests highlighting student work to a school-wide initiative of creating exemplars (S-C, P-7, R-247, I-0033).

Another participant commented about the role of the vertical teams and the school improvement plan.

We had vertical teams here, which I found very valuable, and we did the multi-grade levels and we had a numeracy team and we had a literacy team. I of course went on the literacy team. So we did several initiatives that were from the school improvement plan that were to help us increase our literacy scores (S-C, P-8, R-57, I-0040).

The principal went on to provide a specific example:

We're going to sing happy birthday then the next morning they are going to do a writing piece about it. They can write about their own party and we're going to take those samples back to our vertical team meeting, we're going to go through them and we're going to create an exemplar, a set of exemplars for each grade level: primary, elementary and middle school (S-C, P-7, R-219, I-0033).

The principal then went on to explain how the exemplars will be used:

Those exemplars will be in the classroom so when a child is writing, rather than going to the teacher they will take a look at that exemplar. Now this actually ties into our school improvement plan because this is one of the things that we wanted to do with kids. So it fit into that as well (S-C, P-7, R-247, I-0033).

Similarly, this principal offered another example about how the school improvement plan contains strategies to help make change. This time the example was about lesson planning and the role of the administrator.

On our school improvement plan we're talking about lesson planning. So when I go through and do a walk through or whatever I'm looking for specific things. I mean there's a list right there. We have a list of hard items and soft items for lesson planning and that's directly tied to the school improvement plan so you know that's definitely on their mind because when I come in and do a walk through or I'm doing an evaluation I'm looking at lesson planning and there's certain things on that lesson plan that has to be, that has to be on there (S-C, P-7, R-103, I-0030).

Beyond the structures put in place to utilize school improvement plans, there were numerous comments about how the school improvement plan was brought to life and the driving force behind it. These comments included:

You know it is alive, again it goes right back to the administration. For example, on the school improvement plan the first thing on the plan is your mission. You take a few minutes and flip the mission statement up on the screen and review it. And I mean I can tell you what this school has done in the last year. I mean we've made positive phone calls, I mean one of our parts we've had a literacy morning, we call it Book and Bagel. We keep in contact with parents. We've got a new website. So you know those are things we've done in our school improvement plan (S-C, P-7, R-107, I-0030).

Sense of Purpose

There was a plethora of quotes I selected to support the theoretical code – *sense of purpose*. The majority of participants were very clear in their understandings of the importance and purpose of school improvement plans as reflected in the following quotes:

I think school improvement plans are an opportunity to focus resources into something which has been identified as a potential or real problem in your school. If you use data or your perception surveys or you use school reviews and if the improvement plan makes sense to teachers because it is an authentic opportunity to improve something which has been identified, then that's good. (S-B, P-5, R-23, I-0028)

So that for teachers it's a big picture based understanding but it is making sure that the execution strategies that are taking place day to day are in alignment with what we say is the overarching issue. (S-B, P-5, R-101, I-0034)

One thing the school improvement plans have done is certainly given schools a goal. (S-C, P-7, R-87, I-0030)

I think it is a good thing for sure. It certainly gives the school a goal where it's going, gives the staff a chance to reflect on what is needed. (S-C, P-7, R-15, I-0030)

I think the first thing that comes to mind is the consistency of focus. The SIP gives the teachers an understanding of the broader context. It's almost like

well, of course beginning with the end in mind, so with the SIP it allows you to work backwards so that people understand what they're doing is impacting a bigger focus. So instead of having a lot of microstructures and everybody out doing their own thing and everybody trying to just live inside their own world, this allows us to be part of a bigger picture. (S-B, P-5, R-338, I-0038)

One thing about the school improvement plan, it is clearly an end in mind where we are all headed. (S-B, P-5, R-350-0038)

What we tell our teachers is that we believe in something and it is in our school improvement plan and everything we do. (S-B, P-5, R-129, I-0034)

SIP is to formally capture a critical aspect of what you say you want to do. (S-B, P-5, R-113, I-0034)

That was our improvement plan was to 1) collect data and 2) to promote formative assessment. (S-C, P-8, R-656, I-0040)

So what I found is that while you keep the focus with the school improvement plan, I do like the opportunity for teachers to have more involvement and say I got a better way of doing this. (S-B, P-5, R-350, I-0038)

So really everything we're doing, everything we're doing does tie into the SIP. (S-C, P-7, R-439, I-0033)

Several participants commented on the importance of keeping the school improvement plan 'alive' and a 'living document'.

You got to keep it in front of people. You got to say, "this is what we believe in." At staff meetings when we talk best practice and it's really professionalizing the staff and again having them understand what is created is primarily their structure, not something I imposed on them (S-B, P-5, R-192, I-0034).

You got to find a way to make it right in their face how it impacts teaching in the classroom (S-B, P-5, R-87, I-0028).

The school improvement plan is more of a living thing that's based on the reality of the teachers' day to day experience (S-B, P-5, R-23, I-0028).

It's not like they keep a school improvement plan in mind all the time and use that as their primary decision making structure. They are more interested in their daily challenges but at the same time embedding that into the culture that's being created in the school that is impacted by the school improvement plan because the school improvement plan is focused and narrow in some ways and the attempt of the school is to make sure that it is a living document (S-B, P-5, R-97, I-0034).

You know it's a fluid document ... you know I think in September when we look at that goal and sort of putting it into hard copy, we relook at it and readjust it as the year goes because some years you know we make more progress (S-B, P-6, R-327, I-0035).

In addition to the school improvement plan being flexible and in the forefront of what teachers do, participants also commented on the importance of their input into the development of the school improvement bringing resolve to their purpose.

This is my belief, the power for school improvement is not in the office. It's out in the classrooms (S-C, P-7, R-343, I-0033).

Because it's co-created we all share an investment in it and I think we're all very proud to be here and to be part of this because I think it is progressive (S-B, P-6, R-524, I-0039).

It comes back to a genuine belief in why we are here and me monitoring the systems allows teachers to execute that and inside those systems the teachers

use their professional discretion and skills and judgment or whatever to make it work. So it's kind of like that (S-B, P-5, R-129, I-0034).

If we come across best practice or if teachers in their studies or whatever or in their discussions find a better way, we can unleash them. I don't have to keep pushing them. What we have to do is find ways to make it better and continue to keep it in front of teachers as opposed to one more thing that may help us, or may cause us to implode because not one more project. But they see it as just being naturally embedded in what they are doing and they take it and make it work for themselves (S-B, P-5, R-358, I-0038).

I think and I also think it's co-created. You know we've learned that even when we think about taking responsibility for things, when we expect students to take responsibility for that it works better if they co-create whatever it is: their learning or the assessment tool. We know that that's how people work best. I think it's no different for us. So the leadership team distributes things in a way that teachers can find their interests and their passions. They can work toward contributing to the SIP in a way, under that umbrella, in a way that makes them feel good about themselves. The leadership trusts us. They work closely with us and they know we have a lot of responsibilities and that we take the lead in that and because we're given that trust and that autonomy we feel good about it (S-B, P-6, R-51, I-0035).

So there's buy in from the get go, that's right and I think that's the thing, they allow us to construct the rubric that's going to guide what our best practices that are going to get us to the place that the SIP needs us to be (S-B, P-6, R-227, I-0035).

Finally, there were a few participants that valued how the mission and vision of their school guided their sense of purpose.

So I would always say that a school improvement plan should be embedded inside a mission and vision that's a living thing in a school (S-B, P-5, R-374, I-0038).

Since moving to this school I feel that we've really changed the way that we look at the whole system of the experience of being educated. I think this a really progressive school and I think we look at things and how they connect

and so we connect everything to essentially our big mission and vision which was co-created by all of the staff members here. And I think that's been really, really important in terms of our SIP because things are now directed toward that (S-B, P-6, R-35, I-0035).

Sense of Interdependence

Teachers and principals using the school improvement plan and working collaboratively to make change in their school was another theme scattered throughout the data. This *sense of interdependence*, as evident in the following quotes, was supported again in several of the remaining interviews.

Well I think this school like most, like many schools has tried many different things and almost I think if you've had enough heads around the table when you make a decision...if you keep trying and plugging on something and if the research is there, then it should work (S-C, P-7, R-524, I-0039).

We have flexible groupings and an interdependent structure. Everybody's kids in that group you are responsible for. So you got to do your part, you are accountable to your peers (S-B, P-5, R-316, I-0034).

I think part of why we're very successful at that is just because we're so collaborative and we work so closely together that it's never out of sight, out of mind kind of thing (S-B, P-6, R-43, I-0035).

You know, there are a lot of challenges and if we don't work together there's no way we can do it (S-C, P-8, R-474, I-0044).

We're always trying to figure out with whatever area we're trying to grow in, what is the professional body of research that would say this is how we would best execute the interventions (S-B, P-5, R-386-0038)?

I really think the idea of learning and growing together and feeling like we have that team approach, that collaborative approach it's so much better and the amount of professional dialogue you hear... but when I sit in my classroom and I listen to teachers in the hallway or we go into the staff room I

would say most of the dialogue is professional dialogue about best practices, about good things that are happening, about moving students forward (S-B, P-6, R-467, 471, I-0039).

The value placed on having someone else in the school to help or to learn also speaks to having a *sense of interdependence* as reflected in the following quote.

The idea of having, of trusting someone to have that relationship with them of feeling not evaluated or judged...you know it doesn't matter where you are in your practice or where you are in your career. I would be one of the most senior people here but I absolutely feel I have a ton to continue to learn and I learn so much from you know other people who are just beginning. They have new fresh ideas, so I think that's important too (S-B, P-6, R-331, I-0037).

Additionally, teachers also valued the role of the administrator particularly when they felt autonomous in their work as indicated in this quote.

I think the autonomous part comes with the trust that the admin team places on our classroom practices and on our ability to keep each other accountable and sort of police ourselves if you will. So you know we're all guided by curriculum and all of the things that are mandated, however, beyond that they also understand that because we're the people in the classrooms we can sort of I don't know, plan and execute what needs to happen in the classrooms in the best way that we see that's going to effectively educate the students (S-B, P-6, R-207, I-0037).

Another participant made several points about how the administrative role changed if the right people were in place.

When you got willing able people you get out of the way and you let them use their discretion to do this thing organically. If I didn't have willing able people I would be much more directive in what I did (S-B, P-5, R-145, I-0034).

So because I've got that I'm less micro managing, right? I can step back because they are capable of making these decisions. They're on the frontline, they are willing able. I just get out of the way and facilitate their ability to make it work inside the classrooms and (S-B, P-5, R-354-0038).

The peer element is bigger than me going around as an instructional leader supposedly trying to figure out what people are doing right and wrong and then me having kind of a bureaucratic approach and try to change people (S-B, P-5, R-320-0034).

Sense of Other as Navigable

Another theme that emerged in the first and second phases of data analysis was how the participants dealt with everything external to their work in the classroom with their students. The data showed that this *sense of other* was either *navigable* or *defeatist*. It seemed that the participants that could navigate everything that was in front of them while at the same time keeping focused on the school improvement plan were able to make change in their schools. Some of the following quotes from the remaining interviews supported this notion.

So it's not just the school improvement plan when it talks about plan, it's about other things that teachers are expected to be considering when they make any decisions, inclusion would be one, there's other policies (S-B, P-5, R-101, I-0034).

What we have and what we've learned is we have to create support for the staff because one of the things that happens in education is we get all of this, we have mandated things. We have curriculum, we have all of these things coming at us and we don't want to continually add more, add more, add more, so we need to find ways to fit, you know we're not trying to add more. We're trying to incorporate it into the structure of our practice so it needs to become every day practice. If we feel that this is our goal then we need to ditch the good for the great. That's sort of our motto (S-B, P-6, R-131, I-0035).

Teachers reassess what they do on a daily basis and figure out what really doesn't, what counts and what doesn't count and to realize that you know at the end of the day there's only so many working hours and we can't make the day twenty-eight hours long. We can't change the length of the week. We can't do any of that but we can control what we do during those hours. So that was kind of my strategy to get, to get beyond that sort of mind block about all the changes. We can choose to do what's the most effective, or has the greatest impact during the hours that we are in fact working. (S-B, P-7, R-496, I-0036)

One participant put it in perspective when faced with dealing with all of the other initiatives coming at teachers.

That's why you can't just transfer from one soil to another because the soil might be full of weeds and crap, right (S-B, P-5, R-358, I-0038)?

Sense of Change

Central to the research question was if change occurred as a result of teachers using the school improvement plan. Again, there was strong evidence in the remaining interviews that a *sense of change* occurred. There were only a few comments that referenced student achievement in relation to change.

Our student achievement is good but what is also impacted is perception surveys that shows that kids really like this school, right? And that's really important because you are not going to take responsibility for your own learning if you don't want to be in the place, right? So clearly something is happening (S-B, P-5, R-180, I-0034).

My response is that in our school every kid who's not on an individualized program should pass the assessment. So we're not saying it should be sixty, seventy, eighty, hundred percent of kids who are doing grade level work should pass. Why would you have lower expectations than that? Why would you say well next year we'll move it up to seventy-two percent? We want every kid to pass

(S-B, P-5, R-208, I-0034).

I think there are areas where we still need to grow for sure but I certainly think we're making progress and I think that it's reflected in the student learning. And I think in conversations that you have with students if they understand their strengths and their needs I think they understand more effectively how they learn and what kinds of strategies and tools they need to effectively learn and I think that the fact that they can help themselves is huge (S-B, P-6, R-572,

I-0039).

I think another thing is increased student engagement I think because all of that results in what we've learned, I think what we've learned about picking out best practices like identifying high yield practices that actually work and not and again, this is part of staying focused on the goal, so not adding more things but changing our practice so we're more effective (S-B, P-6, R-387,

I-0037).

Participants highlighted a variety of changes resulting from their use of the school improvement plan.

We now have documents we call them personal education profiles where we help students decide their goals (S-B, P-5, R-180, I-0034).

So we're helping students have aspirations...so this is kind of an authentic way to link back to the idea of taking responsibility for your own learning. So we're creating these documents for kids, create their aspiration and then they have their immediate goals (S-B, P-5, R-180, I-0034).

I think in terms of the spirit of the school and the culture of the school it's done a lot of positive things in terms of relationship building as well (S-B, P-6, R-461, R463, I-0039).

New ideas. New methodology. Enthusiasm (S-C, P-7, R-641, I-0036).

Change is always an interesting process and we have seen some changes here. For example, I have students starting, doing blogs, distribution lists and that's on our school improvement plan part of the mission where we want to connect the school to the community so we've been really talking about and working towards more communication (S-C, P-7, R-488, I-0036).

So we really have worked on ferreting out exactly what we can do to raise the bar and make sure that we have best practices right across the board (S-B, P-6, R-259, I-0035).

So we're creating a concept in our school where in the end we want the kids to be at their very best because they've taken learning on as their own (S-B, P-5, R-236, I-0034).

So I think we're very clear as to what a best practice is and how we should be managing the students and I think there's a sense of the school spirit and the

idea that we're all working toward a collective idea is really present here like it's helped in the school culture. And I think again, the idea that students you know everyone at their best that students are really experiencing success in places they weren't before and they feel good about it. And that's what I see especially in terms of Math and this idea of them taking responsibility for their learning. I think that they understand more about themselves. They understand more about their capacity to learn and what that means, what it looks like and how they you know how they can use tools that we provide them and strategies to help themselves. And I think that you know they see themselves as leaders. They see themselves as able. They see themselves as successful and I think that's, that's huge (S-B, P-6, R-387, I-0037).

In addition, several participants referenced change happening in their classrooms.

So if it's a real problem, it might be something to do with Math or whatever, then teacher are really seeing that it makes a difference in how they teach (S-B, P-5, R-23, I-0028).

There are people on staff, we do a study, we understand what it's all about. We know the various aspects of it but then we work through the problem with implementation, okay and this is the idea of making change (S-B, P-5, R-47, I-0028).

Math is an area that, and Science, that we're trying to build better practices in elementary school because they often get left and we understand the value of learning to read but we've become quite good at it and I can only speak for this school and so we really have systems in place to help people progress appropriately in reading and writing (S-B, P-6, R-275, I-0035).

But I would say teacher engagement for sure in the SIP, I would say probably a sense of belonging, a sense of teachers working with teachers. Not feeling alone, collaboration. I would say maybe some teacher products that link to students, for example the assessment continuum that you talked about (Researcher response 361, 365, 369, 373, I-0037).

Accountability also emerged in the remaining interviews in a similar fashion as did before in the coding processes of the first four participants and their interviews.

We talk to the students about it and make sure that we value it so they value it and that's part of the accountability process, which is why I think we do well with our goals is because we continually keep each other accountable (S-B, P-6, R-131, I-0035).

So I think the accountability piece is that because we co-construct it and because we link what we do to the flexible grouping, we flexible group in Math, writing, reading and word work so essentially a balanced literacy and balanced math block are all within flexible groups in three to five teams and extend actually even beyond down to grade one (S-B, P-6, R-227, I-0035).

One participant equated change to using high yield strategies, similar to what a farmer does.

If you're a farmer and you've got an acre you try to make sure you get the best yield out of that by using the best farming practices possible. Change happens because of how we really use high yield strategies, right? So even if we are saying there is an issue or whatever, what are the best practices (S-B, P-5, R-59, I-0028)?

Several participants commented that they experienced change as a result of working with the school improvement plan and their focus was now on continuous improvement.

So I mean the creation of the SIP and then implementing the strategies that go forward and then having success and then so then going back and saying "okay, so then what's the next step to make sure that the students are still growing"

(S-B, P-6, R-299, I-0035)?

It's really helped and now we see the value in it for other things that we can you know to use that time and that structure to help teachers in other ways. And the teachers understand you know our motto this year was "We have not arrived" (S-B, P-6, R-331, I-0035).

I'm not sure. At this point, I think originally it was the SIP that drove our need to change the structure of how we teach and the structure of how, sort of the system within the school to effectively address the student needs. But now it's

a cycle, I think it all, it just continues, it continues to, everything feeds into everything else so as we get better I think our practices get better and we're more focused on the goals then I think the SIP goal becomes narrower and narrower and narrower and I can see that because we've had a similar goal for a while. And we've been able to narrow it and narrow it and narrow it, and then I can see at some point we can probably grow it because we've become so effective at addressing these areas (S-B, P-6, R-299, I-0035).

But I think you know you're getting there when you can actually look at your school improvement plan and say "yeah, you know what? We can cross that off now. We did that. It's implemented. It's part of the culture" (S-C, P-7, R-135, I-0030).

Finally, quotes from these participants highlighted lesson learned when trying to make change in schools. The first quote spoke to the importance of understanding the context of a school.

Yeah because that that's got to be understood when we're talking about how we're putting the school improvement plan in place. It may not work in other schools the same way because it's a different context. The one thing I have learned from Fullan and these guys is that context makes a big difference

(S-B, P-5, R-358-0038).

Another lesson learned is that change takes time as reflected in these quotes.

Yeah, they've tried so many things and I am going to guess too a lot of teachers their own personal interest and their comfort zones play a big part in that. Change is hard so if you're asking teachers to do something different it's you know it's a struggle. It takes a long time to change a culture. It takes a long time to change a school (S-C, P-7, R-55, I-0030).

Now you need four or five years to build momentum with it. So the staff right now is, their attitude is yeah, this is just another SIP that somebody wrote but again, I think the key is to move forward. Revisiting it. We're going to do it. We're going to come back, oh by the way, look at this. We didn't do this yet. Let's try this. And you know you just got to keep drawing them back and eventually you get to a point where the staff looks back and says yeah, no we

have, we have done a lot on that SIP. It's time to change it or move on with it (S-C, P-7, R-665, I-0036).

Finally, being optimistic that change can occur seemed to be a lesson learned as well.

It's always interesting because the immediate reaction is a number of reasons why these things won't, why they can't do them. There's never enough time. We've done this before and it didn't work and I'd like to change that statement to we did this before and we didn't make it work. So there's always that resistance to change and then sort of as time goes by you will always get one or two staff members who will be curious enough and they will try the change and then pretty soon you'll you know you'll revisit it in a staff meeting and you'll find that you have actually a fair number of the staff following along and trying to change (S-C, P-7, R-492, I-0036).

Do you know what makes change? When I go into a school and I work together with the teachers and they don't see me. I'm not an administrator. I'm a co-worker. They know I've been in the trenches. They know experience and we work on stuff together and we look at the data together (S-C, P-8, R-193, I-0040).

If people have a general understanding of a school improvement plan and if they're capable and they are motivated and they are getting enough constant feedback, then good things happen (S-B, P-5, R-75, I-0028).

Theoretical Codes Not Leading to Change

Conversely, there was evidence in the remaining interviews that supported the following five theoretical codes that showed how some participants believed that the school improvement plan was not leading to change in schools.

Sense of Complacency

One participant put it quite bluntly and commented “people are not talking professional practices” (S-B, P-5, R-386, I-0028). Eluding to the status quo and keeping things the same, this conclusion was made:

It’s about what people think is conventional wisdom, what’s worked for them but it’s not based on educational research (S-B, P-5, R-390, I-0028).

Another participant concluded:

A lot of the staff are just literally fried. When you say SIP they just glaze over because I think in a lot of schools for a long time it’s been a document, right? It’s not a living document so it’s going to take a while to change that (S-C, P-7, R-359, I-0033).

I still think for the majority of classroom teachers it’s still a document with all the other things they have to do. It’s one that gets set aside (S-C, P-8, R-44, I-0040).

Sense of Disillusionment

Complacency seemed to extend itself into the theme of disillusionment. One participant noted:

Without the support to actually make sure it’s implemented in the classroom, it’s back to the idea you got a school improvement plan but we don’t have the power to execute it (S-B, P-5, R-47, I-0028).

A parallel to a lesson plan was made to make the point.

It’s not really based on academic practice. So when you do SIPs the execution, the visibleness has to come back to highly, highly professional practices and that’s where a lot of it falls down because with every school improvement plan you better find best practice that’s going to address that. It’s like a lesson plan. You see some lesson plans, they are beautiful. You go in and you watch the teaching, the execution sucks because the person doesn’t know. So that’s one

of the problems with school improvement plans. They can look beautiful on paper but they are often messy when you start to put them into place right (S-B, P-5, R- 398, I-0038)?

In addition, what got done with the SIP beyond the school was also a source of disillusionment.

I think for a long time they were used as a document that was developed in the office by the admin people and then something that was touched on once a year as “this is our you know larger goal” and then it almost was paperwork that went to the office, to the district (S-B, P-6, R-35, I-0035).

So it’s not that it doesn’t matter, it’s that actual document that still seems to be something that administrators need to turn in at a certain date to keep other people, from higher up the chain, happy (S-C, P-8, R-57, I-0040).

And I guess it’s because when it gets pulled out, when we see it come out, there’s almost a collective groan of God, here we go again you know (S-C, P-8, R-422, I-0040).

Additionally, not all participants in the study knew about the contents of the SIP as noted in this comment:

When I came here two years ago I had the school improvement plan, I didn’t know what it was and a lot of the things in it. And so I started going around to the staff and neither did they (S-C, P-7, R-275 I-0033).

Other sources of frustration came from the realities of the context that participants face in their day-to-day work. A familiar reference here was time.

The problem I would see with school improvement planning is twofold. One is time, you know I think it’s easy to identify what the school needs. It’s not easy of course to write a mission and a vision but the most difficult part is finding the time to actually do it and revisit it. We work in such a busy, busy environment that it’s almost, school improvement planning is you know “well, we got it done, that’s it. It’s stored.” It used to be put in a folder and now it’s

stored electronically and unless it's revisited and revisited and revisited it's not really going to be that meaningful (S-C, P-7, R-15, I-0030).

We only have one day a year to really talk about school improvement planning which is that first PD day after Christmas (S-B, P-7, R-351, I-0033).

Another problem pointed out by the same participant was district office.

So you know that's the way it was, right? They were doing it, it was being done because the district demanded it being done (S-C, P-7, R-299, I-0033).

Finally, one participant equated the sense of disillusionment beyond the context of the school.

I have a concern that the accountability of the school system and universities on preparing teachers for the profession is virtually non-existent. The university assumes that schools are going to put people with good teachers and that they are going to pass on progressive approaches, but that's not always happening. So I'm saying if that's the case, let's take a look at one of the main goals is that if you're going to have students take responsibility of their own learning, you have to have teachers modeling that too and making continuous improvement and it's not happening (S-B, P-5, R-308, I-0034).

Sense of Isolation

Some participants felt that they worked in isolation and the school improvement plan was simply a plan that did not bring cohesion to improvement efforts or to the staff.

I mean it's not like anybody sits down and says let's take a look at this. So it's not like it's connected to some kind of accountability structure (S-B, P-5, R-117, I-0034).

The importance of the vision and mission of the school was reinforced again.

When we talk about school improvement plans, without a mission and vision school improvement plans can be isolated events that last for a year or for three years or for however long you take (S-B, P-5, R-374, I-0038).

Additionally, a caution was extended about how the SIP can be reactionary to data or school reviews and steps are taken as a response rather than being embedded into the culture of the school.

The school improvement plans are based on when somebody gets a perception survey back or a school review and then they do these things but they often do them in isolation and everything is connected in a school. And without a big overriding value system we can do a lot of isolated silo things that sound good (S-B, P-5, R-374, I-0038).

But there was one participant who provided a solution for the sense of isolation.

I mean one of the things in the SIP for example is encouraging teachers to go to other schools and we this year, we've paid supply teachers well to relieve our teachers while they went and visited different schools. I've had one teacher who's been to three different schools here to just get out of the school, you know to get out of the isolation and see what other people are doing (S-C, P-7, R-637, I-0036).

Sense of Other as Defeatist

This theoretical code reflected the constant changes taking place in schools and the effect it had on teachers. As one participant noted "our education system has given us a hundred different acronyms for a hundred different things over the years" (S-B, P-8, R-430, I-0040). The comments below were selected to reinforce that several participants in the study felt defeated by many external forces out of their control that affected their ability to make meaningful change in their school. One participant put it succinctly - "if everything goes, nothing goes" (S-B, P-5, R-129, I-0034). Another participant reflected on the outcome of too much change and the effect it had on teachers in relation to the school improvement planning process.

The second thing that I see with school improvement planning is that over the years, and I'm just going to go back to what I just described, there's been so many attempts to change things in schools and in the province and there is so many new things that none of them, I don't think any of them have ever been in

place long enough to really perfect them. So teachers have become cynical, you know what's the latest new thing? And it seems like we just get started on it and then we move onto something else. So teachers I think have become cynical about the whole school improvement process planning (S-C, P-7, R-15, I-0030).

Now the sense of school improvement or the school improvement plan in the building, the teachers are very I'll have to say they're somewhat negative about it because of their past experiences but it takes a long time to change the culture in the school and there is a lot of resistance (S-C, P-7, R-467, I-0033).

I've had some difficult situations in my career that almost cracked me and you know I said whoa, I'm not getting paid enough to lose my mind (S-C, P-8, R-482, I-0044).

Other comments reflected similar sentiments.

Yeah, we've done this before. I've heard this before. We've done this. You know we tried that and it didn't work (S-C, P-7, R-131, I-0030).

Yeah, stick around five years, if you don't like what we're doing now we'll be doing something different in five years which is unfortunately very true (S-C, P-7, R-75, I-0030).

The things that happened throughout the years including quick mandates from the district tend to really eat into a lot of my time. There are so many other things that the district wants and that the department wants (S-C, P-7, R-387,

I-0030).

Still others were more specific with their reasons for the SIP not working. These reasons included the lack of time to spend on the SIP, the acknowledgement that schools are complex places, and that school improvement plans are often too rigid.

Number one is that I personally have learned that when you have rigid documentation or rigid approaches in a complex structure like a school it doesn't

work. It's a square peg in a round hole. Schools just aren't run like that in reality. Anybody that's trying to have rigid school improvement plans without having a vetting systems and letting people evolve has got a problem and then everything tanks with that (S-B, P-5, R- 374, I-0038).

Schools are very fast paced and any school improvement planning I think the district sets aside one day a year essentially so any time we have for that is going to be during professional development days. It's just, this is not practical to do afterschool. Teachers are tired and they already have a number of meetings a week so that really needs to be done during professional development days and it takes a long time to just discuss one part of a specific goal and get the staff to buy in to it and you have to give the staff time to discuss, time to speak about their concerns and that takes a tremendous amount of time (S-C, P-7, R-51, I-0030).

The most difficult thing with school improvement planning that I find is getting a time when you can sit down... so the most difficult thing about school improvement planning is getting, first of all you have to have your whole staff input and then getting it broken down into smaller sort of subsections or teams in the school, right? So that's the most difficult thing is getting that common consensus with on your school improvement plan. You get a lot of negativity

(S-C, P-7, R-123, I-0030).

Other challenges surfaced in the data as well. The following comment reflected the importance of sticking to the mission and vision of the school.

Schools that don't have missions and visions have a bit of a problem with school improvement plans because it's a flavour of the day and it's based on some kind of an immediate problem. It's about the big issue that should always be addressed (S-B, P-5, R- 374, I-0038).

Yet, another participant noted the influence of the top down structure in this comment.

I think that's a huge challenge of school improvement planning is that it tends to be from the top down and teachers for a variety of reasons don't buy in, or

they're not given the chance to buy in but we generally work in a top down system and I think the key is from the bottom up and you know to do that you really have to have a staff that really wants change and is willing to put the time and effort in (S-C, P-7, R-15, I-0030).

'Covering the curriculum' was seen as a challenge in this comment.

Our teachers still feel that pressure to cover the curriculum and that's something I think we need to get away from. There is no sense covering the curriculum if the kids don't know it. You know so I think generally we're starting to get away from that but teachers still feel the need to cover the curriculum (S-C, P-7, R-75, I-0030).

One participant acknowledged that students and parents have changed as well.

Well, our clientele has changed dramatically. The attitude towards education from our parents has changed dramatically so it's hard to measure the success of these plans I guess but there's been a lot of other changes that I see anyways, education certainly doesn't have the importance with families that it used to. Used to be you know if you got your schoolwork done then you did the extracurricular things and now there is a big emphasis on the extracurricular, hockey, soccer and all that so school takes a second place

(S-C, P-7, R-87, I-0030).

Sense of Perpetual Motion

There was a *sense of perpetual motion* in some of the data from the interviews. These comments reflected the frustration that if everything stays the same, then likely not much will change. In particular, if nothing happens with the school improvement plan or the strategies within it are not made visible, then change will not result. The following quotes were selected to reflect this point.

If the school improvement plan is just about getting a document out of district office and figuring out what you're going to do every year because it is a mandate then it has absolutely no impact on the school (S-B, P-5, R-23, I-0028).

So when you do SIPs the execution, the visibleness has to come back to highly, highly professional practices and that's where a lot of it falls down because with every school improvement plan you better find best practice that's going to address that (S-B, P-5, R- 398, I-0038).

Making learning visible. In other words, how do we visibly show something and that's a really critical thing. In other words, you got a school improvement plan but where is the visible execution of it (S-B, P-5, R-386, I-0038)?

The experience of this participant questioned if improvement planning had resulted in changes that were expected.

They accomplish some of it for sure, yeah. I think the proof is in the pudding when you look at our academic scores. Have they improved? Not greatly. You know there is the district plan, a provincial plan...they've set these plans and they've been in place a long time but for the amount of effort and time I don't think they're getting the bang for the buck that they should and there's just a lot of reasons why (S-C, P-7, R-83, I-0030).

And the other things is I think a lot of the school improvement plans are glamorous and they are just way out of touch and way beyond what can possibly be done in a school. So if you want to look at our SIP I can show it to you but I can go through it and highlight the things that we are actually doing (S-C, P-7, R-363, I-0033).

People can talk a great game and they can show that they know content but it would be like a surgeon, he might pass a test and say you know all about the brain but it doesn't mean you can operate on anybody (S-B, P-5, R-47, I-0028).

Several commented on the difficulty of making change referring to the reluctance by some teachers to 'shift their focus'.

But even after you've got a plan, sometimes it's hard or difficult to get teachers to shift their focus from what they're doing to what the plan wants them to do. So sometimes it's difficult, even though you've identified what needs to be done and the staff has bought into it, it's difficult to get because they have to let go of something. There is only so many productive hours in the day and in the public school system those days are full. So you have to

really you know you have to get teachers to let go of one thing and then focus on something else (S-C, P-7, R-15, I-0030).

I mean a lot of teachers are stuck in doing something the same way for a long while, you know they've done things well, we've done it this way for twenty-five years" and I will say have you taught twenty-five years or taught one thing twenty-five times (S-B, P-7, R-496, I-0036)?

But change is never greeted with open arms, it's always greeted with reasons why we can't do it (S-C, P-7, R-492, I-0036).

Finally, one of my favorite comments from the interview data was from a participant who saw both sides of the effects of school improvement planning:

Well it certainly helped because up until, up until this point it was like a bad marriage. We were just going through the routine (S-C, P-7, R-287, 291, I-0030).

Curriculum Vitae

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Education

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University of New Brunswick

Reading Recovery Teacher Leader Training Course (one year-1996)

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Masters in Education (1995)

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Diploma of Advanced Undergraduate Study (1993)

Special Education, Guidance and Counseling

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York Region Roman Catholic Separate
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Professional Affiliations

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Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
National Staff Development Council
Solution Tree
American Educational Research Council
International Congress of School Effectiveness and Improvement

Personal Interests

Family Time
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Selected Publications and Presentations

Morrison, D. (2015, January). *School improvement planning: A failed hope?* Paper presented at the 28th International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI), Cincinnati, OH.

Morrison, D. (2011, January). *Defining school effectiveness: Examining current accountability practices and their implications.* Symposium presentation at the 24th International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI), Limassol, Cyprus.

Morrison, D. (1995). *Introducing critical literacy in the classroom: A teacher's search* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, NB.

Research Projects

Grade 2 Class Size Project. (2009). New Brunswick Department of Education in collaboration with Dr. Bill Morrison, University of New Brunswick.

Examination of Alternative Education Sites in New Brunswick School District (2010). In collaboration with Dr. Bill Morrison, University of New Brunswick.

Parent-Mediated Reading Interventions with Children up to 4 Years Old: A Systematic Review (2013). In collaboration with Dr. Liz Sloat, University of New Brunswick.

Sustainability of English (L1) Reading Skills in both L1 and the Second Language Context (2012). In collaboration with Dr. Joe Dicks and Renée Bourgoïn, University of New Brunswick.

In excess of fifty proposals to both federal and provincial governments to acquire funding to support the education of First Nation students and communities. Key areas include strengthening teacher capacity in literacy and numeracy, leadership development programs, early years initiatives, governance infrastructure, community and parental engagement, and student transition and employability programs

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