

# **Examining the Factors Affecting the Implementation of the Five Year Instructional Strategies Institute**

By Neva Grout, Eva Ratzburg, Tracey Todd

In a future context of declining resources, escalating expectations and turbulent environments, schools will need to be designed so that changing is considered an ordinary activity rather than an extraordinary event. (Leithwood, Jantzi, Steinbach, 1999, p.214)

Fresh approaches to educational reform are required to effectively respond and adapt to new challenges in our evolving knowledge-based society. There is a need for systemic renewal in education as we are faced with new ways of thinking about teaching and learning (Fullan, 2001, Leithwood, 2001, Schmoker, 2004, Marzano, 2003). Useful innovations exist to help overcome this problem, but good ideas alone are not enough: effective implementation of those ideas is crucial. For public education to thrive, new initiatives must not only be put in place, but educators must also pay attention to current research on factors affecting implementation of those initiatives.

The “Five Year Instructional Strategies Institute” is an innovative education initiative, which began in 2003, in the North Vancouver School District. It is designed to build teachers’ knowledge and skill base in the use of instructional strategies, thereby improving student achievement. District administration recognized that knowledge of curriculum foundations was well embedded in the district but there was a lack of capacity in the delivery of the knowledge. Inconsistency in the level of skill set for delivery of curriculum existed among teachers throughout the district and intervention was needed to address this inconsistency. The Five Year Instructional Strategies Institute was seen as a program which could provide the teachers with the skills necessary to enhance curriculum delivery.

With many initiatives being introduced to improve teaching and learning in the education system it is important to examine what factors allow for successful implementation of educational reform. The purpose of this study was to research what the literature says about factors that contribute to or detract from program implementation and examine them in the context of the implementation of the Instructional Institute in North Vancouver. Given that the academic literature is rich and diverse on change and education theories, the researchers, in an attempt to answer the larger question “*What factors contribute to or detract from the implementation of the Instructional Institute in the North Vancouver School District?*” have chosen to narrow the focus of the research study. The researchers have provided the reader with a framework encompassing the following three themes:

- 1) Factors Affecting Implementation with an emphasis on Shared Vision
- 2) Contributions of Collaborative Environments during the Implementation Phase
- 3) Professional Development during the Implementation Phase

Specifically, our research set out to answer the following questions in light of the literature and the data gathered:

- Was there a shared vision and consensus by all stakeholders for the Instructional Institute?
- Did educators value and perceive the need for collaboration during implementation?
- Was professional development contributing to the implementation of the Instructional Institute?

### **Research Procedures**

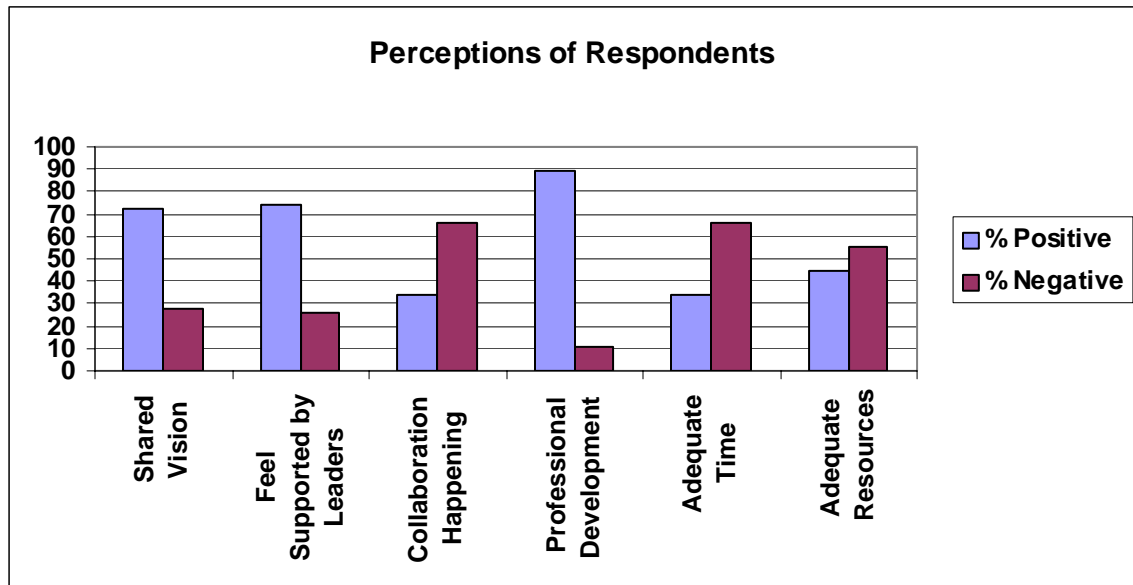
The following steps were taken to obtain information for answering the research questions set forth in this study:

1. The study was conducted in North Vancouver School District in the province of British Columbia.
2. Surveys were sent to 144 elementary and secondary year-one participants in the Five Year Instructional Strategies Institute.
3. 102 surveys out of 144 were returned (82 elementary respondents, 20 secondary respondents) Responses from surveys were coded and analyzed in graph form. Anecdotal data from the survey were grouped into factors affecting implementation.
4. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted during a two-month period. This included the superintendent, two district personnel, the outside consultant, two administrators and a teacher.

It is worth noting the overwhelming return rate for this survey. The researchers believe this is a reflection of the strong appeal of the initiative and the participants' desire for the initiative to succeed. Furthermore, the researchers feel the respondents took the opportunity to use the survey as a vehicle to voice their opinions.

In conclusion, the following graph succinctly summarizes the data from the surveys and gives an overview of the findings.

Figure 1: Responses to “interview questions”



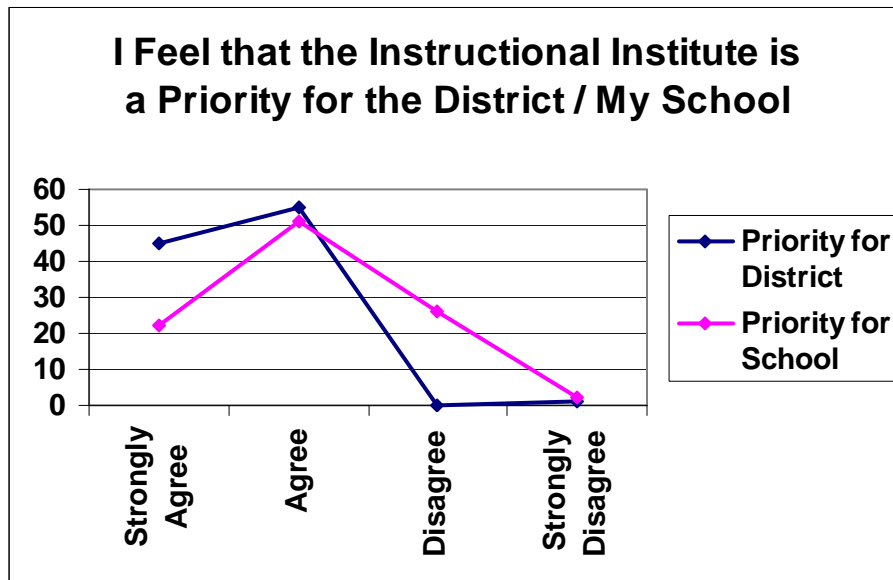
**Was there a shared vision and consensus by all stakeholders for the Instructional Institute?**

As identified by Senge (1990), creating a shared vision is essential to the successful implementation of an intended educational change. Miles (1987), identifies two dimensions of a vision: “The first is a sharable and shared vision of what the school could look like; it provides direction and driving power for change, and criteria for steering and choosing... The second type is a shared vision of the *change process* . . . what will be the general game plan or strategy for getting there?” (Miles, 1987, p.12).

The bar graph in Figure 1, for shared vision illustrates that 72% of respondents perceived the shared vision of the Instructional Institute as being positively established in the district, while 28% of respondents perceived the shared vision of the Instructional Institute as having not yet been established at the school level.

While the Instructional Institute is viewed as a priority for the district and schools, there is a division among a significant number of respondents that indicates that a shared vision at the school level has not yet been achieved (See Figure 2). This division between the district (school district central office personnel) staff and school staff may reflect difficulties articulating the second dimension of the shared vision, which Miles (1987), refers to as “. . . the general game plan or strategy for getting there . . .”

Figure 2: Percentage of Respondents who feel the Instructional Institute is a Priority for the District and Schools



The researchers conclude that while there are some elements of an implementation plan known at the district level, the plan is incomplete. With many critical pieces of a well-designed implementation plan missing, schools are unclear about the direction of implementation for the Instructional Institute. Additionally, the existing elements of the implementation plan are not well communicated from the district to the school level.

Recommendations:

- To facilitate the implementation action plan, it is recommended that a position be created at the district level for a leader whose sole responsibility is the implementation of the Five Year Instructional Institute.
- District personnel need to design an implementation action plan (not to be confused with the timeline for implementation).
- District personnel need to communicate the shared vision and implementation action plan to leaders at the school level who are expected to implement the initiative.

**Did educators perceive the need for collaboration during implementation?**

Recent research into what schools are doing in practice to implement change is altering how we view educational reform (Senge 1990, Duke 2004, Fullan 2005, Leithwood 2001). The strategies used by schools that are successful in dramatically improving student achievement combine the energy of their teaching professionals with the active promotion of teamwork and collaboration

Figure 1 illustrating respondents' perceptions of supportive leadership clearly indicates that 74% perceive that they are supported by leaders in the Instructional Institute; both at the district and school level, and that only 26% feel unsupported. The bar graph addressing collaboration on the Instructional Institute indicates that 34% of respondents' perceive collaboration is occurring within their school while 66% perceive that such collaboration is not happening in their schools. It further reveals that 66% of respondents perceive that they do not have adequate time for planning, reflecting and networking.

The researchers conclude that both the literature review and survey respondents identify collaboration as one of the most important factors that contribute to implementation of the Instructional Institute, which requires both leadership and time. The researchers conclude within the structures currently in place participants did not perceive there was adequate time to implement the changes to their instructional practices recommended by the Instructional Institute. Taking into consideration that the survey respondents represent the most actively involved and motivated 10% of North Vancouver teachers involved with the Instructional Institute, the researchers conclude that although respondents could identify leaders at their school and at the district level there is a lack of clarity and direction from leaders.

#### Recommendations:

- In secondary schools, create a common meeting time within school timetables.
- In elementary school, create regularly scheduled time dedicated to this initiative.
- Leaders in collaboration with school staff should establish an infrastructure for on-going participation and collaboration.
- Introduce the use of an implementation tool such as an Implementation Rubric designed specifically for schools to help identify their placement on a continuum for each of the factors revealed in this study that affect implementation of the Instructional Institute. (See attached sample Rubric)

#### **Did professional development contributing to the implementation of the Five Year Instructional Strategies Institute?**

Teachers' professional development has been identified as fundamental to improving elementary and secondary education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Darling-Hammond, 1997). There is an emerging consensus that professional development of teachers is significantly important to educational reform.

As shown in Figure 1, 89% percent of respondents perceive that professional development has provided them with an adequate understanding of the reasons why the use of instructional strategies is important and that professional development is positively contributing to the implementation of the Five Year Instructional Strategies Institute. Finally, 55% of participants expressed the need for resources to support the implementation of the Instructional Institute.

The researchers conclude that while most respondents believe that the professional development provided to-date has been valuable and is contributing to the implementation of the Instructional Institute, they are asking for more formal and job-embedded professional development with resources to support the innovation.

The literature recommends the use of resources to support professional development. “Effective educational change not only depends on adequate resources, but on the flexibility to make onsite adjustments in how resources are allocated to support reform (Hill, Campbell & Harvey, 2000, p. 69).

This assertion was corroborated by 55% of survey participants who expressed the need for resources to support the implementation of the Instructional Institute.

Recommendations:

- The District needs to continue to be proactive in the formal process of professional development.
- Over the next three years, the District in partnership with the North Vancouver Teachers’ Association should collaborate to plan existing professional development days targeting the instructional initiative.
- Leaders involved in the Instructional Institute at the school level should give top priority to assisting and facilitating job-embedded practice.
- All resources supporting the Instructional Institute should be made readily available.

Analyzing this stage of implementation of the Instructional Institute has allowed the researchers to reflect on what has been done to implement the program and what needs to be done in the future to ensure continued progress. District leaders need to pay attention to the recommendations in this research report, as these are key to the success and sustainability of the Instructional Institute. Zmuda, Kuklis and Kline state “It isn’t the relevance of the innovation that has failed. It’s the way the change is introduced and implemented that gives it a short lifespan” (Zmuda, Kuklis, and Kline, 2004, p.13).

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