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Flexible Scheduling: How Does a Principal Facilitate Implementation?

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This study investigated flexible scheduling in United States elementary libraries that had received no funding to implement the change. The larger study examined many elements of the implementation, but this article looks specifically at the role of the principal in the implementation of flexible scheduling in the six schools involved. Principals' beliefs and behaviors were described by principals, librarians, and teachers in regard to their role in implementation. Principals supported flexible scheduling because they believed it would have a positive impact on student learning. They were willing to take risks because they trusted their librarians to be leaders in the implementation process. Librarians depended on their principals to be strong advocates for the change to flexible scheduling and found that the change was facilitated by the principal's support.

Change and Leadership

Public education is a work in progress. Reforms and new initiatives continually appear, with positive results invariably expected and hoped for. Experienced teachers and librarians have embraced many new ideas, some of which have proven effective and some of which have not, for a multitude of reasons. Some educators have developed a mistrust of change itself if they have been subjected to ineffective implementation of many new ideas (Evans, 1996). And sometimes the failure of an innovation can be blamed on a lack of understanding of the change process itself (Fullan, 1991).

Many researchers now accept a common description of the change process (Fullan, 1991). They view it as having three phases, labeled in a variety of ways. Fullan uses the labels *initiation*, *implementation*, and *continuation*. Initiation, also called mobilization or adoption, is the period when "someone or some group, for whatever reasons, initiates or promotes a certain program or direction of change" (p. 48). During implementation, or initial use, the people affected attempt to use the new program. Continuation (or incorporation, routinization, or institutionalization) is the acceptance of the innovation into regular practice. Fullan includes the outcomes of the program in this picture of change. He cautions that this explanation of change is highly simplified and that the actual process involves many factors and complexities.

In a swiftly changing educational environment, many initiatives are introduced and abandoned. Regardless of the inherent merit of these attempts to improve education, instituting real change is difficult. Leadership clearly

has an impact on whether proposed changes will last more than a few months or years. The principal's role in this is vital, but not sufficient by itself. Heller and Firestone (1994), in their study of eight schools, found that, in contrast to evidence from previous research, no "heroes" emerged as leaders. Instead, leadership was shared by a team. Drawing on earlier work (Firestone, 1989; Firestone & Corbett, 1988), Heller and Firestone (1994) cite six leadership functions in the change process that might be shared by principal and librarian: providing and selling a vision of the change, obtaining resources, providing encouragement and recognition, adopting standard operating procedures, monitoring the improvement effect, and handling disturbances.

"Good leaders foster leadership at other levels" (Fullan, 2001, p. 10). In schools where teacher-librarians are encouraged to lead, reforms related to effective information access and use are more likely to be possible. "Library media specialists, individually and collectively, need to seek leadership positions and to carve out positive and visible places for themselves in the reform effort" (Hartzell, 2001).

Flexible Scheduling Innovation

Innovative elementary librarians have recognized the educational value of allowing teachers and children to access and use library materials at the point of need. In schools where library time is provided on a fixed basis, often weekly, the library seems to be an appendage, a place where children can be sent to be tended by the teacher-librarian while the teacher spends her time on something of greater value: curriculum planning. That undervalued library is typically not an extension of the classroom, nor is information literacy integrated into the curriculum of that school.

Seeing the need to teach information literacy meaningfully, many librarians have tried to lead their schools to more effective practices. One initiative has been to implement flexible scheduling in elementary school libraries, with varying degrees of success. Does the principal have a role to play in implementing a flexibly scheduled library? How does leadership affect implementation? A recent study of librarians, principals, and teachers in elementary schools in the United States provides a window of opportunity to explore the principal's role.

Flexible scheduling means different things to different people. Donham van Deusen and Tallman (1994) describe three types of scheduling that emerged from various schools that responded to their survey: fixed, mixed, and flexible. Fixed scheduling is a situation where "a group is scheduled to come to the library media center for instruction or use of resources on a regular basis (often weekly), for a set length of time, frequently for the school year" (p. 18). The flexible schedule is one where "the library media specialist and the teacher plan together for instruction or use of resources based on student learning needs in each curriculum unit and schedule on that basis.

The schedule is arranged on an ad hoc basis and varies constantly" (p. 18). A mixed schedule is one that

could have been classified as flexible, because these participants worked with some teachers to schedule classes on a flexible basis and, therefore, might have the potential for more curriculum consultation with them; however, these library media specialists also met with some classes on a fixed-schedule basis, thus reducing their opportunity to meet with teachers, (p. 19)

A body of educational research shows that learning is most effective at the point of need. Flexible scheduling in school libraries provides an effective vehicle for achieving the learning goals and objectives of both the school library program and the curriculum by providing resources and learning opportunities when they are needed and relevant. Donham van Duesen and Tallman's (1994) research provided valuable information about the extent of flexible scheduling in school libraries and the degree to which curriculum consultation and information skills instruction occurred and varied in school libraries using fixed, flexible, or mixed scheduling. They found that more positive environments for curriculum consultation and teaching activity existed where

1. Principals expected team planning in flexibly or mixed scheduled libraries,
2. Principals expected school librarians to meet with teaching teams, and
3. Librarians were full-time and did not cover teacher planning time.

They also found that collaborative units were more frequently carried out in flexibly scheduled libraries where at least one formal planning session occurred (Tallman & Donham van Deusen, 1994).

Reporting on a 1997 study of Canadian school libraries. Ken Haycock (1998) confirmed Donham van Deusen and Tallman's (1994) findings. Haycock suggested that flexible scheduling might be "more indicative of leadership practices and collaborative activities than having a causal relationship with consultative tasks" (p. 23)

These findings are useful as support for implementing flexible scheduling in order to encourage curriculum consultation and effective information- skills teaching. However, little is known about effective implementation of flexible scheduling. Based on her previous research, Donham van Deusen (1995) suggested that several conditions must exist if flexible scheduling is to be successfully implemented. The school must have:

- An information skills curriculum matched with the content area curriculum;
- Flexible access to the library media center;
- Team planning;
- A principal with expectations for collaboration with teachers;
- A commitment to resource-based learning, (pp. 17-18)

Donham van Deusen also suggested two other factors that might enhance flexible scheduling implementation: adequate support staff and an assess-

ment plan for the school library media center (p. 18). The importance of these factors has not been studied in depth.

Library Power, a project funded by the DeWitt-Wallace Readers Digest Fund, created flexibly scheduled school libraries in 19 communities across the US. Hopkins and Zweizig (1999) evaluated this program extensively through case studies, questionnaires, and extensive documentation of practice. Flexible scheduling was a requirement for participation in the Library Power program and the evaluation showed that "for many ... teachers, experience with the flexible schedule was required for them to have some sense of the benefits it could bring their teaching" (Zweizig, 1999, p. 20).

The evaluators noted that "the majority of teachers report that their students are using the library more (65%), are using it more on their own initiative (60%), and have a more positive attitude toward using the library (72%)" (Executive Summary, n.d.). Principals were often credited with making flexible scheduling work by providing strong support and by devising creative solutions to the problem of providing planning time for both teachers and librarians (Zweizig, 1999). Some principals' expectations for curricular involvement by librarians increased throughout the project (Hannesdottir, 1999). Principals learned that librarians can be curriculum leaders (Hopkins & Zweizig, 1999).

Shannon (1996) investigated the development of flexible scheduling in two Library Power schools in Kentucky. She found that the principal's support was key. The librarians in her study found that the principal sets the tone that will affect how teachers respond to the idea of flexible scheduling.

From these studies, we now know a great deal about implementation of flexible scheduling in situations where significant monies are provided for implementation, and we know a little about the role of the principal in these situations. Most schools around the world, however, do not receive extra funding contingent on implementing flexible scheduling. The questions arise: How and why does flexible scheduling implementation occur in schools where no mandate related to funding exists? What role does a principal play in these situations?

Oberg (1995) studied the role of principals in promoting effective school libraries. A small group of novice and experienced librarians reported that principals supported the school library program by "making explicit statements about the value of the program, by being visible in the library, and by being a model for teachers by using program in his or her teaching" (p. 224).

An international study of the role of the principal in supporting information literacy through school library programs by Oberg, Hay, and Henri (1999) explored principals' perceptions and beliefs. Among others, the top 10 priorities, present and future, held by principals included:

- "ensur(ing) information literacy in the school plan,"
- "advocating] the role of the teacher-librarian in the school curriculum,"
and

- "encourag[ing] staff to use wide range of resources in teaching" (Table 3),

all elements that could be directly or indirectly related to supporting flexible scheduling. Principals and librarians agreed that "the teacher-librarian should provide a flexible timetable for needs of individuals, groups, and whole classes."

Research Design and Methodology

This research project attempted to delve into the implementation of flexible scheduling in elementary schools where the incentive was other than access to additional funding. It examined the concept of implementation broadly, not just in terms of the principal's role. But as the study progressed, and principals were interviewed and the teachers and librarians interviewed described principals' behaviors, it became apparent that the principal's role warranted a closer look. It was not possible to isolate the implementation phase, however, as the precise moment when a program moves from one change phase to the next is difficult to determine. Therefore, some exploration of the initiation and continuation phases also occurred.

The current study was based on a broad definition of flexible scheduling. Flexible scheduling was considered to be a scheduling arrangement that allows for variation in library use, rather than having each class scheduled into the library for a regular, fixed period. The definition says nothing about how flexibility occurs, nor does it differentiate between access and specific programmatic features, in order to explore the concept as broadly as possible from the viewpoint of the participants. The participants themselves assessed whether the implementation was successful, and their own understanding of exactly what they considered successful was part of the information gathered.

Elementary schools were selected for the study because flexible scheduling seems to have been more difficult to implement there than in secondary schools. The primary purpose of the study, then, was to explore effective flexible scheduling implementation in elementary school library media centers in order to determine how successful implementation occurs and to identify factors that affect that success. Specific research questions were:

1. Why was flexible scheduling implemented in elementary schools where funding was not contingent on flexible scheduling?
2. What factors influence the implementation?
3. On what do stakeholders base their claim for success of the implementation?

Although the study did not strive to prove outcomes of flexible scheduling such as the impact of flexible scheduling on learning, anecdotal evidence of some of those outcomes was gathered.

A preliminary Delphi study established the concepts and ideas to be explored during the investigation. Delphi participants were district coor-

dinators who had been instrumental in implementing or expanding implementation of flexible scheduling in their school districts. These experts provided rich data on many elements of flexible scheduling implementations. Their responses dealt with a wide range of factors, including:

- Support for flexible scheduling;
- The necessity and effect of pre-existing factors;
- The importance of teachers' and school librarians' understandings of the concept and the advantages gained from those understandings;
- Ongoing needs during implementation;
- Barriers to implementation; and
- The importance of a number of variables such as school size, clerical help, and teaching philosophies.

These responses were used to frame the questions asked of participants.

To locate appropriate schools for the study, several expert groups in the US were asked to recommend librarians in schools where flexible scheduling had existed for at least two years. Only schools in the continuation or institutionalization stage (Fullan, 1991) were considered, because successful implementation was the phenomenon under study. Educators in schools still in the implementation stage might not have developed enough perspective to state that implementation was successful. Only schools that were not part of the Library Power initiative—and therefore did not receive additional funding—were considered for inclusion, and the current school librarian must have been responsible for implementation of flexible scheduling.

Recommendations were received from the leadership of the American Association of School Librarians, school library educators, and the district coordinators who had completed the Delphi study. Potential volunteer participants were also invited to identify themselves through the LM_NET discussion list. From these sources, 21 possible librarians were identified. The selection of the final six schools from which participants were interviewed was based on these criteria:

- Flexible scheduling must have been in place for at least two years;
- The principal was willing to be interviewed;
- The current librarian had been responsible for implementation of flexible scheduling;
- The librarian believed that there would be substantial agreement among teachers and administrators that flexible scheduling implementation had been successful.

The 21 librarians were contacted and asked to confirm the first three criteria. If those criteria were met, then all the teachers in their schools received a simple, one-question questionnaire that stated, "The implementation of flexible scheduling in our library has been successful," and were asked to choose a response ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

Schools where the responses indicated 75% or more agreement with that statement remained in the selection pool.

The final determination of included schools was based on an attempt to represent a wide variety of situations so that those who would potentially use the findings might have a basis for comparison. Obviously, it was impossible with such a small sample to represent all variations. Although six schools is a limited study sample, it was appropriate to the qualitative methods employed, and the responses provided useful information.

Telephone interviews were conducted with the librarian, the principal, and a stratified random sample of three teachers from each school: one from pre-kindergarten to grade 2, one from grades 3-6, and one from the entire list of teachers. The questions, determined from the responses in the Delphi study, were open-ended and qualitative, allowing respondents to expand in whatever direction they felt was appropriate.

All groups of interviewees were asked similar questions wherever possible. Then each group was asked a set of questions relating specifically to its members' own roles, perceptions, and understandings. This article addresses specifically the principals' role in implementing flexible scheduling.

Findings: Principals' Responses

Principals were asked to define and describe flexible scheduling as it worked in their schools. They described their roles in implementation, why they had supported flexible scheduling, and what their prior knowledge and experience had been. They discussed the demands made on a principal; the advantages and disadvantages of flexible scheduling; the benefits to students, teachers, and librarians; the implementation process; the problems they had dealt with; the solutions to those problems; and the fiscal implications of flexible scheduling. They identified characteristics of librarians and teachers that made flexible scheduling work. They described their perceptions of changes generated by flexible scheduling, such as differences in their own thinking, in how their teachers teach, and in students' learning or behavior. They provided advice to administrators and librarians who are considering flexible scheduling.

What Is Flexible Scheduling?

The principals were asked to define and describe flexible scheduling and how it worked in their schools. They responded by associating it with one or more of five elements:

- Meaningful access when needed;
- Curriculum integration;
- Collaboration;
- Flexibility and adaptability; and
- Availability of the librarian as a valuable resource.

One principal suggested that it allowed for effective use of "the teachable moment."

In listing what they saw of a positive nature in flexible scheduling, the principals perceived flexible scheduling as providing a better opportunity for collaboration between teachers and the librarian and for curriculum support. They described students as having more opportunities, being more excited about the rich experiences they encounter in the library, and becoming more independent. They described their libraries as a "hub of learning," a place that is learner centered.

In describing perceived disadvantages, the principals primarily addressed logistics. Prominent was concern with the potential for the librarian and the facility to be too busy to accommodate all who needed or wanted access. At the same time, some were concerned about whether all classes were making enough use of the library, or whether all students were getting into the library.

The principals were careful about attributing too many positive effects to flexible scheduling. Although they volunteered that improving student out-comes was their reason for supporting flexible scheduling in the first place, they all understood that it was impossible to know whether the improvements they noted were a direct result of flexible scheduling alone. Many believed it more likely that the gains were the product of a mix of factors. Despite the lack of conclusive proof, however, they were all anxious to continue with flexible scheduling, which suggests that they believed that the outcomes were positive.

The Principal's Role in Implementation

Because implementation was the focus of the study, principals were asked about their role in that implementation. Not all the interviewed principals had been in office when flexible scheduling was implemented in their schools, but those who had been said that they were in favor of the idea from the moment they first heard about it. Sometimes their support was there because they felt the library was underused or inappropriately used. Some-times they just believed strongly in the logic of the idea.

Whereas some felt they had played minor roles, most saw themselves as leaders or at least partners in making flexible scheduling happen in the beginning. They described themselves as cheerleaders, advocates, supporters, communicators, enforcers, promoters, and enablers. They suggested that their continuing role was to monitor what was happening in the library, to make sure that students were getting the access they needed.

All gave credit to the librarians for the successful implementation, sharing in that credit only tangentially. Although they did not typically discuss the librarians as leaders, they clearly trusted the librarians' knowledge and skills and had confidence that they could carry out the plan effectively.

How Did They Learn About Flexible Scheduling?

These principals learned about flexible scheduling initially either from their librarians or through officials in their district offices. In some cases, the

change to flexible scheduling was imposed by their school districts, and principals and librarians were trained about the concept. In others, the librarians themselves approached their principals, who might already have been aware of flexible scheduling in other schools. They often brought the principal articles to support the idea. One principal joined her librarian in observing libraries that had already implemented the concept. Another principal had been a teacher at the time of implementation and became convinced of its merit through the collaborative experiences shared with the librarian while in the classroom.

Dealing With Implementation Problems

Principals identified two problems with which they had had to deal. First was the initial reluctance, or at least the inexperience of teachers. Second was the challenge of how to cover teacher planning time.

The principals helped librarians sell the idea to the teachers by communicating their own support for it, by discussing the concept openly in staff meetings, and by articulating what its advantages could mean to teachers and students. Sometimes the principal's firmness about expectations helped teachers understand that it was important to stay with their classes while they were in the library. Some principals linked the potential of the library with curriculum standards to overcome the resistance to change.

Providing an alternate time for teacher planning was often an effective way to overcome resistance. Teacher planning time came from new subject areas, such as science or computers; from varying the amount of time students spent in other special subjects, such as music or physical education; and from creating unique programs of optional courses taught by community members.

Promoting Leadership

Several principals indicated an interest in developing leadership abilities in their librarians and teachers, or they supported already existing leadership abilities. One principal expressed the need for partnerships between teachers and librarians. That principal's librarian stated that her principal "tries to grow and develop the teams and the leadership within the school" (participant response).

Advice From Principals

The principals were asked what advice they would give administrators who wished to implement flexible scheduling in their libraries. They strongly suggested visiting other libraries together, talking to supporters of the concept, and trusting their librarians to carry it out. They advised administrators to share evidence of positive effects on student learning as part of the regular staff conversation. One suggested piloting the concept in a small way before moving it to the entire school.

They advised librarians who wished to implement flexible scheduling in their elementary school libraries to obtain the support of their principals first, visit other libraries with the principal, and then work with influential and respected teachers. They suggested starting small and not expecting miracles immediately. "Celebrate the triumphs," said one principal. "Have patience!" said another. They recommended promoting the ways in which flexibly scheduled library could meet student needs and support learning.

The principals advised the librarian whose administrator is not supportive to "Keep selling!" They suggested trying flexible scheduling on a small scale, beginning with one or two people, to demonstrate how it works and then sharing the success. One proposed taking advantage of a schoolwide thematic curriculum initiative to pilot the idea. Another recommended providing articles for the principal to read and then taking him or her to visit schools that have achieved recognition for flexibly scheduled libraries. Then she hesitated and said, "You know, that's what my librarian did, now that I think about it!"

All these principals had become increasingly supportive of the idea of flexible scheduling over the years. None was willing to see the library move back to a rigid schedule, although some did not completely dismiss the possibility that increasing enrollment might force this to happen. All were excited about the collaboration and the active learning taking place in their libraries.

Findings: Responses about Principals

The librarians and teachers talked about their principals' roles and involvement in implementing flexible scheduling. Their comments supported the principals' own assessments of their roles and their support.

Characteristics of Principals

Librarians were asked if their principals showed any specific characteristics that they felt had affected the implementation of flexible scheduling. Apart from identifying their principals as risk-takers, willing to try new things if students would benefit, the responses addressed principal behaviors as much as characteristics. The librarians consistently pointed out:

- The principals' willingness to support change that led to improved student outcomes, in terms of student learning and access to resources and services;
- The leadership the principals provided by making their expectations clear about how students and teachers would access and use the library;
- The principals' confidence in them as demonstrated by allowing them to carry out their plan as they saw fit;
- The principals' visible support of the librarian and the scheduling change, demonstrated by regularly appearing in the library to observe the effects of the change, being involved in initial planning meetings,

and providing vocal support when teachers expressed negative reactions.

As might be expected, however, not all principals and librarians had exactly the same conceptions of what constituted support. One teacher-librarian wished that her principal would show more visible support, attributing her problems with teacher negativity to what she considered insufficient backing from the administration. Interestingly, that principal believed that she had been strongly supportive because she had agreed with the concept. She believed that nothing else was required from a principal. She saw the task of changing teachers' perceptions as the librarian's job. These discrepant perceptions raise some interesting questions about principals' perceptions of the librarian's leadership role and of general beliefs regarding what *leadership* means.

Principal's Role

Librarians saw principals as advocates for the change to flexible scheduling. They relied on this vocal support to convince some teachers about the efficacy of the change. Some teachers reported that the principal's advocacy, which they perceived to be based on a strong belief in the value of flexible scheduling to the children, influenced their own and other teachers' attitudes.

Conclusions and Implications

Implications for Practice

As in any qualitative inquiry, little can be generalized from this small sample of elementary schools. Still, three consistent findings emerged across all six schools and are worthy of attention.

The importance of visible principal advocacy. Advocacy on the part of principals was considered vital by all participants. Librarians emphasized how much they needed the continuing vocal support, and principals knew that providing visible support was an important part of the role that they had played. This conclusion supports Heller and Firestone's (1994) leadership functions of "providing and selling a vision of the change" and "providing encouragement and recognition." The vital nature of principal support means that it needs to be secured at the outset. This implies that librarians and principals need to have frank discussions to forge mutual understanding of the difference strong principal advocacy can make to successful implementation and exactly what support means in this context.

The principal needs to be willing to take a risk. These principals were risk-takers. They were willing to take a chance when they trusted and had confidence in the implementer (the librarian). They were not threatened by the possibility of the librarian emerging as a competing leader, and some actively encouraged the development of the librarian's leadership skills.

These findings imply that librarians working with principals who are afraid to take risks may find it necessary to provide as much evidence as possible that the risk may be smaller than principals fear. Research summaries, consultant expertise, testimonials from other principals, and visits to successful schools with flexible library scheduling may help to minimize the fear of risk for these principals.

Confidence in the librarian also reduces the principal's sense of risk. The librarian needs to show the principal that he or she is prepared for implementation and can be trusted to take advantage of the new teaching and learning opportunities that will present themselves under the new scheduling arrangement. There is research evidence that a supervisor's perceptions of job competence account for more of the variance in leader-follower relationships than any other factor (Deluga & Perry, 1994). Trust needs to be built in advance of the challenge. These principals were willing to go ahead with the implementation project because they already believed in the librarians' competence, integrity, and commitment.

The principal's focus is on student benefit. In these schools at least, it is clear that the principals' primary interests were anchored in student outcomes. Flexible scheduling drew their support because it offered potential student benefits. Although the principals were not prepared to attribute later gains completely to flexible scheduling, they had all supported the concept out of the belief that the changes would in some way be beneficial to the students. This conclusion coincides with the preliminary assertion developed from data in the larger study that "a particular educational need drove the move to flexible scheduling" (McGregor, 1999, p. 17) in every case. Recognition of a particular curriculum need came first, then the principals perceived flexible scheduling as an instrument to fulfill at least part of that need—leading to their acceptance of the concept of a scheduling change. This strongly implies that librarians who wish to gain their principal's support for flexible scheduling must present the issue in terms of the potential for student learning and other positive student outcomes.

Implications for Further Research

In 1993, Donham van Deusen suggested the need for a study that compared principals' expectations of library media specialists in schools with flexibly scheduled libraries with those with fixed scheduling. This suggestion is as appropriate today as it was then. Clearly, the principals who participated in this study had high expectations of these six librarians, and they recognized that they were justified in holding these expectations because their librarians had delivered on them. Do principals in schools with fixed and flexible scheduling have differing conceptions of the librarian's role and differing expectations of what the librarian can accomplish in partnerships with other teachers for the benefit of learners?

A study similar to the current study, but with a larger sample, could provide further data about these findings, perhaps confirming, refuting, or extending the conclusions drawn thus far. Eventually, a large survey of schools based on the data collected in these studies could provide more generalizable findings about how principals affect and effect changes such as flexible scheduling.

Other research could compare leadership styles of principals in schools with various kinds of scheduling. Is there a link between the principal's leadership style and how that principal views the role of the library program? Comparing the principal's leadership style with the librarian's leadership style could provide information about how effectively changes such as flexible scheduling are implemented when styles are similar and when they are different.

Studies of less successful examples of implementation of flexible scheduling could examine the barriers that exist in relation to principals' leadership styles, belief structures about libraries, and self-confidence as leaders.

Comparing student outcomes in flexibly and nonflexibly scheduled libraries would provide research data about whether flexible scheduling really does make a difference to students. If evidence of a difference in learning and/or attitudes can be shown, the data could convince more principals to consider this innovation in their schools.

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