

## Chapter 5: A School Initiative

A school staff working together may identify a topic or *megaquestion* to focus the school's action research activities. The topic or *megaquestion* may be focused on the unique needs of the particular school or connect to a school system initiative. For example, a school might identify literacy as a topic and frame a *megaquestion* such as, "How can we improve student literacy development in all grades."

The danger in making action research a school initiative is that the leader may try to impose decisions on all staff. Such an approach is usually ineffective.

Action research must be owned and controlled by the individual teacher. Consequently, it is essential that the topic and *megaquestion* be developed by the school staff together and not simply imposed by a school leader.

Once the school's topic has been chosen, each teacher identifies an individual action research question related to the topic and the unique needs of that teacher's own practice. Alternatively, a group of staff may agree to all focus on a single research question such as, "How will using the guided reading strategy increase reading comprehension skills in Grade 1-3 classrooms?"

Each teacher must still be able to choose a critical friend. When action research is a school initiative, there may be a larger pool of potential critical friends within the building from which to choose. However, the choice of a critical friend must be the individual's because the relationship is so important to the action research process.

It is important to allow individual teachers to opt out of action research even when it is a school initiative. Action research cannot be imposed, because it is an individual learning process which must be entered into voluntarily. As teachers see the benefits of action research demonstrated by their colleagues, they will be drawn to the process as a means of improving their own practice.

### Benefits of Action Research as a School Initiative

1. When all staff members are conducting action research related to a specific topic, the group's support for one another is a definite asset to sustaining the research. Teachers feel an obligation to stay at the task to support their colleagues. Colleagues provide encouragement and assist each other in problem solving. In many cases, a synergy develops in which ideas emerge that may not have been considered by individuals working alone.
2. When the entire staff becomes the support network, staff meetings can include time to share findings. The principal can schedule time for staff members to meet and can help to coordinate projects within and across divisions. Having consultants in to share their expertise can provide other sources of ideas and help validate conclusions.
3. When action research is a school initiative, there may be opportunities for schools studying the same topic to partner as critical friends for each other. There is little in the literature on school action research partnerships.