

## Chapter 12: The School Administrator

This chapter provides guidance for principals and vice-principals who wish to make action research work in their schools.

There is some repetition of material from previous chapters so that an administrator who is reading this book may start with this chapter and then go back to other chapters as necessary.

The encouragement and support of a school administrator is essential to help teachers successfully complete action research projects. Teachers can complete projects without administrator support, but they frequently find the process difficult.

Action research can help resolve the conflict between the principal's dual roles of school manager and instructional leader. On occasion, complex managerial challenges can be facilitated by taking an investigative approach based on questions like, "How can we best accomplish.....?"

Moreover, because every school community is different, assessing the value of a particular program or strategy is context-specific. What may work in a school or classroom one year may not work as well in another the next. Every principal needs to ask the question, "Does this approach improve student achievement in my school at this time?" The answer lies in conducting action research in the individual school.

If an administrator has not personally conducted action research, it may be advisable to start by engaging an experienced action researcher to provide leadership and support within the school.

This might be a leader from another school or from a school district action research initiative.

### Modeling Action Research

The most effective form of support administrators can give teachers is to model the action research process by conducting their own action research. When staff see the principal investigating the question, "How can I improve my practice," they are encouraged to do the same.

To model action research, the principal needs to:

1. Examine the earlier chapters in this handbook to establish the essential steps in conducting action research.
2. Develop a personal research question
3. Be very public in proceeding with the study. At staff meetings share:
  - stories of experiences as a principal; the area of concern; the data that informs the concern; the research question
  - the plan to investigate the question; what data will be used to show the impact of the work; how staff can provide input to the study
  - how the study is progressing; what difficulties are being experienced; how the difficulties are being addressed
  - the data, findings, and conclusions of the study.
4. Make connections between the study and studies being conducted by others in the school and in other schools.