



Strengthening an international teacher team profile as a catalyst for development

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In this final phase of the Masters program in Action Research, I chose to work with my own teacher team and examine the role of the teacher team within the organization. Previously, over the course of the Masters program, my focus of study has been on various pedagogical aspects of teaching, reflection and other methods of stimulating motivation among students. After some consideration, I have decided to look at how my own teacher team can be encouraged to focus on being a greater tone-setting entity within the school by becoming more cohesive and cooperative as a unit, through identifying its uniqueness as an all international team and setting strategic priorities, as a team. I want to know if it is possible for my teacher team to work more effectively, towards development and change.

Back in 2006, with the impending Gy07 Reform (national gymnasium reform of the previous social democratic government in Sweden) on the horizon, came the anticipation of and preparation for significant changes on the local (internal) school level, which would lead to major restructuring of the curriculum offered at our school. The Gy07 reform package was never implemented, due to the shift in national party-politic policy, which occurred as a result of the change in national government, from Göran Persson to Fredrik Reinfeldt. However, our school proceeded to implement its planned restructuring, despite the shift in government policy and the cancellation of GY07. Consequently, this decision had a great impact on the local administrative and personnel level, which meant making significant structural changes within the organization. Concretely, it has meant changing the pre-existing curriculum, of 13 years, from a single option, one-track social science program to a new dual option, two-track alternative, for the incoming students of 2007, who are now being offered a choice of an international work-studies track, on the one hand, or a communication and language track, on the other.

Firstly, in light of those upcoming changes, I see this restructuring as an opportunity to actively play a part in defining a new, strengthened role for the ELP (European Language Portfolio) teacher team. So, with the consent of the team and the administration, I have planned my action.

Secondly, given the team's unique multicultural make up, the ELP team is in a pivotal position, at this juncture, to take an inventory of its professional potential, exploit its innate international cultural diversity, delineate its pedagogical goals and establish a greater position of parity within the organization.

Thirdly, being a new member of the team, I am in a natural position to ask some very fundamental questions that need addressing and with new eyes see some of the obstacles that need to be overcome. Together, we face the challenge of moving the team forward, by defining a clearer vision of its goals and delineating a more tangible international profile, within the organization. I want to find out, is if and how we can, as a team, commit to exploring and identifying our potential for development and removing organizational, as well as, personal obstacles to team development?

1.2 Objective and formulating the problem

My intention with this action is to work with the ELP team to define its new role, in order to be better equipped to meet and influence the school's strategy for the upcoming curriculum changes. The administration has given us the mission and mandate to be the best foreign language teacher team we can be. In order to be more competitive in recruiting students we need to define and establish a strong international profile. Together with my team members, it has become critical to define our method and context, to emphasize the uniqueness of our multi-national, mother-tongue staff with a strong cultural profile and international network. We need a distinctive, marketable profile that will be easily and equally perceived, both, internally and externally.

My action is based on a number of round-table team discussions, intended to bring about changes in perception and identification that will, hopefully improve team identity, self-image and team collaboration.

With a clear and strengthened profile, we can become a more vital entity and impetus in the progressive development of the school, as a whole, and more fully contribute in the democratic process of school policy. The main problem, therefore, is formulated as such:
Strengthening an international teacher team profile as a catalyst for development.

In collaboration with team members and consultation with the principal, we will attempt to identify the strengths and unique potential that the team possesses in order to play a key role, in the internationalisation of the program, in the future. We intend to explore how we can become more actively involved in areas of school development where our international identity can be capitalized on and be more fully utilized.

1.3 Context - Team history

I teach English and International Marketing (a bi-lingual course) at Johannes Hedberg School. The school is an independent high school centrally located in the mid-sized Swedish city of Helsingborg, offering a social science program with an international and foreign language focus. At the time of the major school reform of 1994, Johannes Hedberg School was among the first independent schools to establish itself. It maintains a small, city-school image with a stable student body of approximately 135 pupils, a permanent teaching staff of 12-13 educators, headed up by an operative principal and a strategic principal.

A majority of the teaching staff is organized into two teacher teams, commonly referred to as, Eureka (subject integrated/theme based) and ELP (portfolio). There is close accessibility and open communication between the different levels and entities mentioned. Weekly staff meetings are held in plenum, as well as, separate weekly teacher team meetings.

Occasionally, there are other formalized opportunities for both teams to work together with our sister school, Naturhumanistiska Gymnasium, which has a teacher team that works with a third methodology, known as PBL (problem based learning). My counter-part, the English teacher at Naturhumanistiska, is part of the ELP team, as well as PBL, and will be directly involved in the round table discussions of my action.

The ELP team was established two years after Eureka was formed. In the autumn of 2003, the decision was made, that as the teacher for Eng A and Eng B (core curriculum courses), I would now become an integrated member of the ELP teacher team. This meant leaving the Eureka team, with subject-integrated/theme-based teaching. I then began the process of integrating my own teaching praxis, in accordance with the portfolio methodology and learning how the new team operates internally and seeing what part it plays in influencing

school development. My English counterpart was integrated into ELP in 2005, bringing the PBL experience into the group, which I do believe has had a positive impact on the dynamics of the ELP team.

The ELP team includes all five of the foreign language teachers, from both schools - Johannes Hedberg and Naturhumanistiska. They teach the following: Spanish, German and French, as either a third or fourth language, while English is the mandatory second language, taught as either, a core or characteristic subject. The administration thought that it was only natural that my counter-part and I, as English teachers, should become an integrated part of the ELP team, resulting in our leaving Eureka and PBL, respectively. This move could be seen as an attempt by the administration to put new blood into the group. That, now, places us within the context of the ELP team formation.

1.4 Delimitation

From the outset of my action, time was of the essence; due to delays caused by my own inability to identify the focus of my action and formulate my problem, as I found working within my own team to be a very delicate and sensitive undertaking. I had to be extremely careful in formulating my intentions before presenting and selling my action research project to the team, which meant that I hesitated and procrastinated. Researching in one's own team is an extremely daunting undertaking and one that involves great risk-taking, for both the practitioner researcher and her colleagues. My main fear was that I would not be given any cooperation and be met with scepticism and negativity, on the part of the team.

I have chosen to limit the scope of my action to only include my own teacher team, consisting of five colleagues, thereby excluding the other two teacher teams within the school. The other two teams are structured differently and use a different methodology than the ELP team. I do not intend to make a comparison between the three teams, as that would be another action research project, entirely.

When referring to the administration, this refers solely to the school's strategic principal.

The action does not try to draw attention to the differences or inconsistencies existing within

the team but rather focuses on identifying commonality in the following areas; roles, subject-matter, themes, praxis, method, evaluations, attitudes, values and common goals, all in order to create a stronger profile.

The action takes place over a period of several months during the autumn/spring terms of 2006- 2007.

1.5 Disposition

The theoretical part of this paper will be included in the section to follow. There, I will attempt to show how previous research and theory on this and related subjects have formed the basis and provided the inspiration for my action. For the sake of clarity, I have chosen to write the theoretical part in the present tense, along with my introduction. The sections on: methodology, where impending action is seen within an action research perspective; the course of the action; along with a brief summary of the details, will also be written in the present. My discussion and reflections, regarding the methods I have chosen and the validity of the action will also be formulated in the present tense.

On the other hand, I will use the past tense to report on the actual carrying out of the action, the results and my reflections. This will delineate and emphasize the fact that they have been written in retrospect, as opposed to the other parts, mentioned above.

2 Theoretical premises

In this section, I will touch upon a number of theories and research areas, which explore school development, teacher professionalism and cooperation, team building and finally, distance and closeness, as it relates to the role of the action researcher. The reason for this, besides clarifying my role as a teacher team member and looking at the possibilities and obstacles for the team to be a catalyst in school development, is also to summarize relevant research, as a way of underpinning the theoretical foundations that my action is based on. The application of theory in the above-mentioned areas provides a lens through which to better understand my action. Theoretical research that has been done by others can lead me to discovering new perspectives that can guide my project and give me a greater depth and understanding of my own professional development and aid my efforts in doing meaningful action research.

2.1 Theories on school culture and school development.

There is a connection between school development and school culture. School culture is a key factor in school development, says Grunnar Berg. According to Berg, (1999 p.9) school culture can, generally, be described as an invisible system of rules and regulations that on an informal level govern the pedagogical and administrative work that operates within an individual school.

There are a number of complex factors that can be analysed to ascertain the kind of school culture that exists in any given school and, in fact, there can exist any number of different cultures, within one and the same school.

I am not going to attempt to analyse and define the school culture(s) that is/are found at my school but it can be useful to understand the implications of how school culture plays a central part in the degree of success or failure of school development. But from the starting point of my action, it is necessary to have a good understanding of the prevailing school culture, in order to measure if there has been any significant change or improvement within the culture of the school, in general, or the team, in specific.

Andy Hargreaves (1998 p.173) writes about school culture and says, that in literature pertaining to educational leadership, efficient schools, school development and personnel development, there has been a generally accepted truth that a school should have a mission or strive after a mission. A mission acts as a motivator and creates meaning. To consciously strive for a mission creates loyalty, involvement and security in the school environment. This is a strong incentive to development and improvement.

In light of the mission that the ELP team has been given, there is some opportunity to strengthen the bonds of loyalty and enhance collective involvement in the process of working together around a common goal, thereby creating a greater sense of security within the group.

Hargreaves goes on to say that culture has two important dimensions: content and form. Content constitutes all the attitudes, values, convictions, habits, assumptions and conduct that is mutual for a group of teachers. This can be seen in what teachers think, say and do. Form constitutes the relationship patterns and forms of social intercourse/interaction that characterizes members in such cultures. Form can be found in the way in which relationships between teachers are expressed. The standard concept of community, or that one shares things, is not important in this context, since the form of a teacher culture can be, either individualistic or antagonistic.

Relationships between colleagues, albeit, the culture's form, can also change over time. It is actually, through the culture's form that the culture's content is realized, reproduced and redefined. To understand the teacher culture's form, therefore, means understanding the many limitations and opportunities, when it comes to changes in the school and the development of teacher's work.

School development can be a question of the interplay and understanding of the opposite, albeit, interdependent realms, referred to as the outer and inner boundaries, terms coined by G.Berg & E.Wallin and illustrated by Gunnar Berg's - Free Space diagram (1999 p.13-14). The outer boundary is symbolized by the governing of the school, which is studied from a legalizing perspective and the inner boundary is symbolized by the governing within the school, which is studied from a legitimatising perspective. The unexploited space between the inner and outer boundaries, in other words, the space available for action, constitutes the (DO) development of the organization.

Berg further explains that the success or failure of local school development depends on whether we can, in some way, form an opinion on where these boundaries, in reality, are within individual schools. Knowledge of the outer boundaries gives indications for direction and long-term planning, which in turn, allow for discovery of the unexploited space. The inner boundaries must be identified to give us knowledge of the current situation and how, in the individual case, at least some part of the existing available space for action can be utilized. Knowledge of the outer (gathered from analysis of relevant documentation) and the inner (analysis of the school cultures) boundaries, consequently, provides knowledge of the unexploited space available for action, i.e. the space for school development.

By understanding the relationship between the inner and outer boundaries that the ELP team is functioning within, we can attempt to find the free space available to the team where it can define itself and its role within the new curriculum. In formulating and asking the right questions that will raise the internal discussion to an open forum, within the team, the team then has the opportunity to articulate and consider the options, in taking on a new role in the upcoming curriculum changes. Through these round-table discussions the team can discover the free space and thereby lay the groundwork for future areas of team cooperation and team initiative within the school.

Another way in which Berg (2003a) defines school culture is the climate that develops when those who comprise the personnel, devise common strategies to work through and solve problems, of varying nature. When it comes to teachers' culture and school improvement, Ulf Blossing, Ph.D., University of Karlstad writes (2003 p. 99-100), that teachers and school administrators should see their own school culture as an area for improvement, and thereby, subscribe to the idea of teacher team thinking, although this cannot be taken for granted. He argues, that there is a long tradition within the teaching profession that regards the carrying out and development of teaching as something, which each individual teacher is responsible for and therefore, there is no reason to discuss this together with their colleagues in the teacher team.

In my opinion, traces of this sort of attitude can make the job of attempting to research in one's own local arena quite difficult, and I fear it is not easy to break through obstacles of individualism, personal domain and prestige. This can be even greater complicated when the

team is made up of individuals representing a number of different European and North American cultures, traditions and educational training, with all its implications. In contrast, other teacher teams, comprised of mainly Swedish members, may also have a multiplicity of players and personality types but, for the most part, their members have a more homogeneous background, education and frame of reference that cannot be taken for granted in our team. These differences are both, an advantage and a disadvantage and can be seen as a double-edged sword. Clearly an advantage, when strengthening and defining our profile but can have serious ramifications when addressing issues of cooperation, collaboration and confrontation.

Blossing, who previously saw school development as an improvement of the school as a local organization (school improvement), where his focus was primarily on school culture, has now expanded this perspective to include observation of the day-to-day work in schools. As an advocate of the school improvement perspective, he argues that school development, among other things, is a question of how schools use their infrastructure in order to achieve improvements. Mats Ekholm has developed a model of a school's infrastructure, based on Miles' (1965) description of the "healthy organization" where he uses the healthy individual or group as an analogy for being able to see effective and healthy functions in a school organization. The infrastructure includes; the school's communication system, system of power sharing, distribution of responsibility and leadership roles, as well as, the group system and norm system. It also includes the system of rewarding both adults and pupils and the strategies used by the school for maintaining its relations with the outside world.

Ulf Blossing (2003 p.100) maintains that there are a number of alternative cultures, as well as, structures that research has identified and relationships, within a school. Hargreaves (1998) has identified four different types of culture – the individualistic, the Balkanized, the forced-collegial, and the cooperative culture. Staessens (1993) talks about living-apart-together culture, familiar culture and a professional culture. Schlechty (1976) has presented possible cultures within a school by combining two structures – the form of the school organization and the position or status of the students, within a school.

To delineate and briefly summarize the four types of school culture, according to Hargreaves (1998); each teacher taking care of her own, characterizes the individualistic culture, where teaching is done in the way she feels is best. Each one teaching in his/her own classroom and getting feedback on her/his teaching, from colleagues, occurs rarely. This is what Staessens

calls familiar culture and schools with this culture are distinguished by informal contact between teachers. Everyone is happy with one another.

As for the Balkanized culture, cooperation takes place between teachers in different small groups, within the school. The groups are held together by special interests that need to be defended or asserted in the face of other groupings. Differences in status between groups based on subject are emphasized and teachers meet primarily in their subject groups. These special interest groups create conflict in the school, for example, concerning utilization of facilities, access to material and workrooms for teacher, total number of students in teaching groups, scheduling and resources for continuing education. The insulated contact within the group reduces individualism in relation to an individualistic teacher culture. Staessens refers to this culture as living-apart-together culture because he feels that the term Balkanization is associated with an all too strong, historically connected conflict that is unnecessary when describing the working conditions in a school. Balkanized school culture lacks goal orientation. There is no vision for the school's future; this results in teachers not talking about the over-all goals of the school.

The forced-collegial culture (Hargreaves 1998) is characterized by a number of rules, which outline how cooperation shall be organized in the school. This can pertain to; (school administrative) fixed times for conferences, subject areas that shall be discussed, for example, discussions aimed at harmonizing pedagogical points of view and/or common activities that shall be planned and carried out. In the best case, this culture can be a transition phase to a real and strongly felt (by the teachers) need for cooperation. In the worst case, it can kill the elements of cooperation that earlier arose spontaneously. The intentions of the school administration can be to reduce a now-orientation and individualism and strengthen the power of change, although the effect can be nil, depending on the reaction of the teachers. Some teachers do not participate mentally but limit their participation to dutifully being present physically at the obligatory common meetings.

In attempting to position, where the ELP team falls, in relation to the different cultures described here, I would have to say that there is a mixture of cultural traits, which includes individual, Balkanised and forced-collegial, depending on what organizational entity the team is relating to.

In other words, it has characteristics of the individualistic or familiar culture, as it relates to the relationships *within* the team. On the other hand, there are also aspects of the Balkanised culture, when it comes to the team's relationship to the other teacher teams, namely PBL and Eureka. Lastly, one can also see a direct correlation to the forced-collegial culture, when looking at how the team was formed, from the top down, and which is clearly evident by its difficulty in cooperating and building a strong, solid profile.

In the cooperative culture, the teachers themselves initiate and push for improvements in teaching, within the school (Hargreaves 1998). The cooperative relationship between teachers arises and is maintained by the teachers, based on the assumption that this is pivotal to developing their professional role. Cooperation is not limited in time and space to special conferences but rather permeates throughout all the work and is continuously maintained in the communication, between teachers. Results of the development work areas are hard to predict. This is due to the fact that contact ties crisscross between teachers and across teacher teams so that exchanges of ideas happen spontaneously between different parts of the organization.

Again, Staessens chooses his own term for this, which he calls the professional culture. In the schools that had this culture, the teachers saw each other more as colleagues than friends. Teachers are united by the motto "we have an important job to do". In the professional school, there was plenty of room for pedagogical questions. Problems were solved from the fundamental idea that together we can accomplish more than we can do individually. This collective thought, on the other hand, does not mean that individual initiative or areas for development is limited.

I believe it is advisable that these theoretical assumptions, be openly discussed and examined within the team and the school, in order for us to reflect on the type of culture it wants to entertain and emulate. In order to do this, the culture within the school must become a more supportive and guiding one - where a spirit of cooperation, learning and the advancement of knowledge of individual teachers, within the team, are a priority for school development. This has to start at the administrative level, where a well-structured forum for open discussion, exchange of knowledge and experience, as well as, the transfer of in-house expertise can be systematically implemented and followed-up.

When the notion of team can and does, in fact, embody the idea that “together everyone achieves more”, then the possibility for achieving true professionalism and team cooperation can exist. The next section looks at these two aspects in more detail.

2.2 Theories on teacher professionalism and cooperation

The professional activities of a professional group can, in broad terms, be described as follows, “to operate discerningly within given boundaries”, according to Berg (1999 p.70). This raises, at least, two critical questions: Where are the boundaries of the professional activities for different professional groups (i.e. what are the actual assignments), and who or what has the power to set these boundaries (i.e. decide the assignments)? What are the criteria for discerning professional activity, and who or what has the power to establish the content of these criteria? To see how the above description applies to my team, I will outline in detail, in the Action section below, the points in our governing documentation that show the extent to which boundaries are set for the ELP team.

In the post-modern times that Andy Hargreaves writes about (1994 p.31) two of the most important concepts are professionalisation and intensification. Professionalisation refers to those changes and the widening of the role of the teacher as an expression for greater professionalism. Teaching has become a more complex and qualified activity, as teachers take on different leadership roles; become team partners with their colleagues; participate in collective decision-making processes and shall act as coaches within their own area of expertise.

On the other hand, it has been pointed out that the work that teachers do is poorer and deprofessionalised. It is meant that the profession of teaching has become routine and unqualified and that teachers get less opportunity to make professional judgments, which are best suited to their own students in their own classroom. According to this point of view, teachers are treated nearly as alcoholics who are in the process of sobering up: they need step-by-step teaching methods and must closely adhere to the tests and course curriculum if they shall achieve any results. Teachers’ work is described as being more and more intensified with an increased pressure and constant innovations under working conditions that do not keep pace with the rate of change.

Hargreaves (1989 p.31) continues to ask some important questions. “From this perspective, the rhetoric of professionalisation is just something that causes teachers to adapt to their own depletion. The theoretical discussion between, on the one side, those who believe a professionalisation has occurred and on the other side, those who maintain that an intensification and deprofessionalisation has occurred, is not just an academic curiosity. It gives rise to fundamental questions about the character of teachers’ work and what changes it is going through. Is the teaching profession more qualified or less qualified? -More professional or less professional? What does the relationship between the structure of the teaching profession and the goals of teachers, teachers as individuals and teachers’ working environment, look like? How do these changes affect teachers? And can they or can they not contribute to these changes, themselves? “

In my own observations and experience, many of these ideas have come to mind but I have not always been able to articulate them and pose these two factors against one another, as Hargreaves does, but I am certain that many teachers have internalised the ever increasing demands placed upon them and as a result feel a certain amount of detachment and demoralization from their profession. A demoralization and detachment that has a direct impact on the low level of involvement and participation in democratic policy making decisions on a local school level and within ones own teacher team. This leads to an even greater feeling of isolation and believing that one cannot really make a difference in the way things work and how one interacts with others.

2.3 Theories and research on team building

It has been stated in Hargreaves (1998 p.197) that teachers, through team work and collegiality can achieve more in their work than through personal, individual reflection and avoid dependency on external expertise – to be able to, instead, learn from one another, share knowledge and develop in comradeship. Research results indicate that through the sense of security that comes from comradeship and support from colleagues, there is a greater willingness to experiment, try new things and be more apt to consider continual development. In this way, teamwork and collegiality form an important link between teacher development and school development. Teamwork and collegiality is not only seen to be

positive for teachers' professional development and internally initiated school development, but is also seen by many as important in the carrying out of changes that are initiated externally.

Even if team work and collegiality are not a miracle remedy or universal remedy, it does seem to provide many advantages when it comes to creating good and effective organizations. Shulman (1989) has summarized some of the main arguments as: teamwork and collegiality are not only important to create a better moral code and greater sense of satisfaction among teachers... Teamwork and collegiality are also important in that teachers can benefit from their experiences and continue to develop throughout their professional careers. Shulman makes an important point regarding the consequences of this on school leadership. He says, "Schools are encouraged to be like our best companies. They should use modern leadership methods to decentralize authority, make important decisions on the grassroots level. Leadership is not an assignment that should be monopolized by the administration, but rather should be shared with teachers."

Hargreaves (1998 p.198) continues to argue that school development, course curriculum reform, personnel development and leadership development – all seem, to some extent, to depend on building positive and cooperative relations, within the teaching staff. For many, teamwork and collegiality has become the actual key to change in the school.

I want to know just what areas of teamwork are applicable and accessible to the team and me, when considering what we want to change and have the authority to change. By examining our current team praxis, it becomes clearer to me that we need to formalize our context and expand our domain, if we are to function more effectively as a catalyst for change. The weekly team meetings have a very informal structure, sporadic agendas, weak documentation, unclear goals, little delegating and accountability.

When reading what Blossing (2003) has to say on the subject of forced or planned teamwork, he reflects on the meaning of terminology. He states, just as it is not clear what is meant by individualism when used as a term to describe school culture, it is not entirely clear what teamwork stands for. The essence of teamwork within a culture can usually take the form of: teacher teams; mutual planning; mentorship; collegial evaluations or colleague coaching. But it can also be in the form of conversations in the teachers' room, help from a colleague in

finding teaching materials or giving advice or marking evaluations of a student. Hargreaves (1998) points to research that shows that there are, actually, only a few of these work forms that can pass for teamwork in the sense that it obviously breaks the roll of the solitary worker. One seldom finds forms of teamwork that are an expression of professional relationships between reflective practitioners. He goes on to say, that when it is like this in a school, that there is a sort of teamwork that does not, on a deeper level correspond to the meaning of teamwork and professional relationships, the school then has a forced or planned teamwork.

Planned teamwork is nominated by leadership, from the top down and leaves very little room for individual deviation. In the worst case, planned teamwork can be forced teamwork. From the leadership's perspective, planned teamwork can be seen as efficient, whereby, unpredictable results can be limited and the work of the team can be controlled. This strong control can have the opposite effect. Control can stifle flexibility and result in inefficiency. Teachers are forced to take time to be a participant in something that they do not understand the purpose of or not be given the opportunity to carry through with colleagues that they can build a professional relationship with. Teachers become confused, hindered in their work and can even feel degraded.

Hargreaves (1998) maintains that forced and planned teamwork do not just deal with insensitive leadership on the local school level but that it also has to do with national control of schools. Basically, it deals with giving teachers both the tangible responsibility for improving their own teaching and to be able to influence curriculum development.

In examining my own teacher team situation, one can clearly recognize some of the problems as stemming from forced or planned teamwork. The team has assigned meeting times and a team leader has been put in place, by the administration, to run these meetings and oversee the ongoing work of the team. There are no clear goals or set agenda, but rather the agenda is presented, week to week, and the meetings serve more as a forum where relevant information filters down and where individuals report on and solve problems ranging from: teaching, difficult students, classroom availability, scheduling, group-level composition/size of groups, etc. From time to time, there is assigned reading and discussion around specific topics, such as: national school board documents, grading criteria, student evaluations of teachers, etc. The need for this type of meeting is not seen as productive or stimulating but rather controlling and an infringement on value time that could be spent more efficiently.

3 Method discussion

In this section, I will attempt to position my action within the field of action research and touch upon the concept of teacher as researcher. All actions have established parameters, which are defined by methodology: design, planning and construction. In the previous section, I have presented the theoretical foundation on which my action is based; here I will describe and explain my choice of method.

In action research there is seldom just one method employed to investigate a problem, it is a strategy whereby a number of different methods can be used to see the problem from several perspectives, which help to find ways of arriving at possible solutions through the application of carefully chosen methods.

The main methods to be applied in my action will include: participatory observation, logbook, democratic dialogue, interviewing, checking validity and reliability and ensuring good research ethics.

3.1 Action research

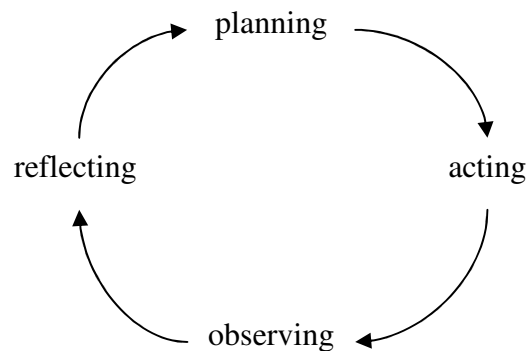
3.1.1 Action research and action learning

According to Stensmo (2002 p.52) action research is a form of disciplined study for the purpose of understanding and changing/improving a social practice – an undertaking that includes people and their interaction. It is a pre-existing, already in progress operation, which shall be changed and attempts at change are done within the natural context of the on-going operations. Change in schools and classrooms means that the main actors within the operations- teachers – in small scale and well-planned interventions, carefully examine the effects of this. He goes on to say that, action research is systematic reflection of that which takes place in everyday situations and professional life.

Action research is often described as having four phases, which are often depicted in a circular diagram, starting with planning (thawing), action (change), observation (re-freezing) and ending with reflection (revision). The circumvention, through the various phases of an

action, can be repeated and carried out in a never-ending spiral, theoretically, as the process is infinite in nature, although the action is finite in its design.

Kurt Lewin describes action research as a continuous, circular process as shown here, in this model.



Lewin's model of the action research cycle

I consider my action to follow Lewin's model, insofar as I have applied these four phases, in the manner that an action researcher is required to do. I have attempted to apply the criteria by; planning in my action in consultation with colleagues, carrying out the round-table discussions, observing my actions, as well as, those of my team members by recording the discussions and reflecting my thoughts in the logbook and assessing the outcome in my discussion and providing the results in this report, for others to read and hopefully be inspired.

Several researchers have spoken about action research as a strategy and not merely as a method. One of them is Ragnvald Kalleberg (1992) says, that action research is not a method or special type of data but rather an entire research plan of a constructive character, where the researcher actively participates in the intervention which changes the field of study. He maintains that "to be a fly on the wall" is hardly the most advantageous in action research because then one is not ready to unlock and experience the resistance that is mobilized when innovation meets tradition.

He states that in an intervention approach, the social researcher intervenes in the area to be studied with the intention to improve it. This is a clear definition of action research, according to Kalleberg. Here again, I can place my action within this definition as my ambition is to

improve the team's status and work situation and my action is designed to intervene by setting a new agenda for our meetings through the round-table discussions.

Another is Jean McNiff (2002 p.13), who also sees action research as a strategy and not simply a method, when reflecting on the evolution of her own understanding of what action research has come to mean to her, she acknowledges that it is not simply to provide a route to professional accreditation, but also to contribute to the thinking and practice of what she began to understand as a good social order, a form of living in which people are free to make choices about creating their own identities and to recognize the need to negotiate those identities with others. As her understanding about the nature of action research evolved, she began to see the link between action research and creating a good social order.

As seen through the eyes of Jean Mc Niff, action research is not a set of concrete steps but a process of learning from experience, a dialectical interplay between practice, reflection and learning. Working out ideas is the learning; working out how to live with one another is the peace process. A final outcome does not exist. The life process in which we work out who we are and how we can live together successfully is the good social order. Hopefully, I will come closer to understanding how the interaction of the team members, with one another, can lead to a sense of empowerment and be team enabling. I can truly say that my role as action researcher is very closely linked to the idea of action learning and learning for life about the true essence of being a teacher and, at the same time, an evolving human being.

Action research should directly or indirectly contribute to changing the living situation of people by getting them involved as participants in the transformation work, according to Matts Mattsson (2004). He points out that action research refers to new knowledge and changed praxis amongst those closely involved and in a greater perspective, improved social relations and relationships. What I think is extremely challenging, is to see if the potential for the team itself, to change and strengthen its profile and see itself as more viable, actually is does exist.

Tom Tiller, through his wisdom, books and particularly his lectures on action research, emphasizes the importance of storytelling, by seeing things as they are, as a means of initiating changes in things we hope for them to become, has been the greatest source of inspiration to me, in my masters studies. In his book, Tiller (1999) talks about action research,

as a means of achieving change in people's way of thinking and acting about research, where the researcher actively participates in the intervention itself, which, in turn, changes the field of study. He describes action learning, on the other hand, as "the little brother" of action research. Action learning is a more direct and immediate version of experience based learning. In schools, action learning is about what teachers and administrators do in day to day practice, while action research is what researchers do when they research together with various parties/individuals in school. These concepts can be related to constructivist pedagogy, which puts emphasis on thoroughness and systemization. Tiller adds that the results should be of benefit to the practitioner, which requires that the practice is made visible and the foundation for action is improved. By fostering open, democratic dialogue between team members and administration and sharing the outcome with the other teacher teams it will allow for greater transparency and hopefully interest other teachers to try actions of their own.

My action, attempts to apply action research through a planned intervention of discussion and exploration on how the team can establish a clear picture of our status and profile and our potential for development. Tiller points out that action learning is a continuous learning and reflection process, where together with colleagues, one works to bring about change. This has to do with understanding one's experiences, both the easily accessible and the deep ones, and challenging oneself through discussion and reflection of those experiences together with colleagues. The power of action learning lies in the ability of the personnel to become aware of and benefit from the knowledge that is found within the organization. By newly interpreting earlier experiences, learning can take place. Within action learning, one uses scientific method, seeks sensible decisions, exchanges good advice and constructive criticism, as well as, learns new ways of dealing. Action learning helps people to be better activists so that they can change operations for the better. In putting these ideas to the test, again, we will see if in fact this action will be an impetus to further action projects, where other team members gain an appetite for action research, in the future.

In looking at these two concepts, action learning is suitably described as the on-going work for change within a school, without a participating researcher, whereas action research describes the work that is carried out, together with a researcher. In trying to see where my own action fits in between these two, I think that it lands somewhere in the middle. The round-table discussions and follow-up interviews fall within the action research field. That which comes, in the form of this report, can potentially fall within the realm of action

learning, once the information here is shared, reflected on and possibly utilized in the on-going development of the school and/or the team. In other words, new knowledge or new interpretations of the team's strengths and potential, can lead to improvements and school development but there is also the risk that it does not.

3.2 Choice of method

Jean Mc Niff and Jack Whitehead (2002 p.72) describe how to do action research and explain that planning and undertaking an action research project means asking questions about: what we are doing, why, and how we can evaluate our practice in terms of the values we hold. She outlines the basic steps in the action research process and Jack Whitehead goes even further and regards the identification of a concern as methodologically central, because it raises the idea of the "I" as a living contradiction, He says that the "living I" should be placed at the center of educational enquiries, not as an abstract personal pronoun but as a real –live human being. As a human being living and working in a social context, "I" often experience myself as a living contradiction. The contradiction can usually be understood in terms of how our values are denied in practice.

- I experience a concern when some of my educational values are denied in my practice;
- I imagine a solution to that concern;
- I act in the direction of the imagined solution;
- I evaluate the outcome of the solution;
- I modify my practice, plans and ideas in light of the evaluation.

(Whitehead 1989)

According to Christer Stensmo (2002), the four cyclical phases of action research, which are mentioned earlier, are described as: planning, action, observation and reflection. By applying the methods, outlined in these two descriptions, by Whitehead and Stensmo, I have attempted to fulfill the criteria for my action. They provide a checklist of steps that I have chosen to use in my methodological approach.

From the outset, in the planning phase of my action, I decided to focus on a particular problem, which stems from a deep concern and dilemma that I experienced. The problem, as I see it, is that the team is a weak link in the organization, due to the fact that we have a weak profile and bad self-image. At that point, I imagined a solution, vis-à-vis my plan of action. I then discussed this with the school principal and with some of my colleagues. As a result of

these discussions and finding support for some of my ideas in the theoretical research I have studied, in this masters program, I constructed my action project. I decided to find out how my own teacher team could be a catalyst for development through strengthening its international profile and identity.

This project is planned to take place over a period of months, where we hold a series of round-table discussions together within the team, with the stated purpose of investigating, through meaningful and purposeful democratic dialog, the team's potential for change through the strengthening of its international profile.

The project is also designed to involve the administration and to get input, on how the principal sees the ELP team now and what its potential for development is. This will allow me to get another perspective on the problem.

The results of the discussions will to be presented to the team, after the series of discussions are held. The purpose of this is to facilitate the reformulating of new questions or get confirmation that the original questions are, in fact, sufficient to the task.

Parallel to the action phase, I will make continuous observations, of the team, as a whole, and individual team members. Observation is one of the main methods used in my action. As my central concern is to find out how the team could become a catalyst for change, I will make observations based on informal conversations in the personnel room, the corridors, and with team members during the course of the action. In order to secure a more reliable interpretation, I will individually interview all team members.

Finally, I will evaluate how effective the team has become in strengthening its international profile and changing or improving its potential to affect development. I will also maintain a reflection log, throughout. Last but not least, I will write a report on the results of the action and present it to the school administration, ELP teacher team and, (as part of my masters), to the University of Tromsø.

3.3 Qualitative and quantitative methods

When planning the collecting of empirical data, I needed to consider what method to use.

Clearly, it is the research question and the nature of the problem, which dictate what methods to use.

Generally speaking, there are two research methods, which are characteristic for action research and those are quantitative and qualitative methods. It is common to find these two methods, within the social sciences and the field of school development research.

According to the Danish researcher, Jette Fog (1979), “Before I know what it is I shall investigate, I cannot know how I will do it.” The point made in this quote, is also expressed by Holme and Solvang (1991), that researchers must make a choice as to which are the most appropriate methods, after carefully considering the advantages and disadvantages of each method. Both methods contain a variety of techniques, which to varying degrees utilize diverse methodical principles; such as analytical and system principles, in order to increase understanding for people, situations, organizations and processes.

Qualitative methods are primarily used in creating understanding, not for the purpose of being generally applicable. The researcher’s starting point is to get close to the individuals/situations that he is investigating, in order to gain deeper understanding. (Holme, Solvang 1997). They go on to say that, the strength of the qualitative method is that it shows the total situation, in combination with closeness between researcher and participants, it increases understanding for processes, context and “the individual’s life situation”. The method’s weakness is that one cannot know how well the question/problem covers all the entities being studied, which means that it is difficult to compare information.

Quantitative method is characteristically defined in terms of absolutes, with concepts such as: precision, broadness in scope, systematic and structured observation, e.g. questionnaires, with set answer alternatives, interest in the commonality, average or representative, distance to the living, interest in variables, repetition, strictness and inflexibility/rigidity. This method is generally seen as the real and most trustworthy scientific method and is bound by many rules for how research should be conducted; formulated, designed, verified, analysed, ethically treated, reported and documented. When investigating a problem involving a large number of individuals, where one is seeking general answers to a series of predetermined questions then the quantitative method is more applicable. (Holme, Solvang 1997)

In the case of my project, where my investigation is limited to a small number of individuals, the qualitative method is preferable.

3.3.1 Participatory observation and logbook

Participatory observation is a collective term for strategies that refer to capturing an aspect of a social reality “from the inside”, that during a part of a research process, one tries to get sight of the perspective, which participants/individuals in a culture or social organization have towards that organization. (Stensmo 2002) He continues to say that in order to achieve this goal, the researcher must participate in the organization/operation over a longer period of time and in some respects, share the life and experiences of the other participants, while at the same time, she must maintain an outsider’s stance and a view from above. It is a balancing act, which demands, thoughtfulness, integrity and self-knowledge.

I choose to use this method to study my teacher team from the inside. The triangular model as describe by Stensmo, illustrates how the researcher has a three-way relationship. I find this model useful, as it to best suits my needs. To be able to put myself inside the action, I can maintain a relationship between myself (subject), the others in the team and the principal (subject) and our mutual state of affairs (object). This differs from the spectator observation method, which is a two-way relationship, according to Stensmo.

Participatory observation is the method of collecting data that was developed by social anthropologists and ethnologists, who studied foreign cultures by participating in them for longer periods of time. This is called, field work/study. In order to be participatory in a culture, the participatory observer must learn the language of the culture, both literally and figuratively speaking. (Stensmo 2002, p. 116) Having been a part of the team for some time, I am automatically positioned in the middle of it.

Being that the other teachers are aware that I am observing them and writing down what is being said in the discussions, as well as, in our informal conversations outside the meetings, one can clearly say that the action is based on participatory observation.

Logbook writing is a qualitative method that I will use to record my observations and reflections, after each meeting, throughout the project. Tom Tiller (1998) says that a logbook is less private than a diary and can, advantageously, be used to document; how my action is progressing, what premise I am basing my actions on and it can provide the basis for understanding why any desirable changes may or may not occur. My notes will be, objective observations and subjective commentaries, as well as, reflections. These will be kept separate to insure a clear delineation between subjectivity and objectivity, as well as, insure a high degree of authenticity.

3.3.2 Democratic Dialogue

In this section I will explore some concepts that give my action validity in light of the method I have chosen, which is “the democratic dialog”. According to research done by Marianne Ekman Philip and Tony Huzzard (2004), they speak about the role of the dialog conference, which is used in organization development. The principle foundation of this approach is based on good communication, which rests on Jurgen Habermas’ idea of free communication. In the tradition of Scandinavian action research, dialog conferences were created according to Björn Gustavsen’s concept of *democratic dialog* (1992). The main objective with this is to encourage interaction between different participants/parties, both in and between middle level organizations. The need to create a social process, where employees are given the possibility to be a part of the discussion about their organization and to systematically discuss it, has gained popularity. This is due to the fact that the social process is beneficial to development and efforts for renewal, which aims at creating value. Consequently, the method of dialog conferences requires that two important principles be combined, both the advancement of discussion that deals with questions of development and the widening of participation in the discussions.

I found these concepts to be an inspiration in my own action and situation. Working within my own organization, even if it is on a much smaller scale, requires the same consideration to the two important principles mentioned above. The basic principles of participatory democracy and exchange of knowledge, experience and opinion lend themselves to what I am trying to achieve in my little case.

Philip and Huzzard, point out that the purpose of dialog conferences are to bring about ongoing dialog among the personnel around the organizational development work, in contrast to depending on external expertise. The discussions create an element of learning and exchange of knowledge, which is based on experience of those present. The discussion should be an intercourse between all the involved parties, an interaction where everyone contributes with her/his own unique knowledge and work experience. The aim of the term “democracy” here is synonymous with participatory democracy, rather than representative democracy. Hereby, meaning that dialog explicitly should be focused on participation – open for each and everyone. That everyone has the right to express his or her opinion. Consequently, it is not enough to simply participate; everyone should be involved in the discussion that can, in turn, result in collective action, such as formulating strategies for the future. Therefore, these discussions are not about defining concepts, but rather about investigating and identifying possibilities. The purpose of the discussions is not to have a consensus, but to reflect together on problems and thereby, gain a greater understanding of them, which can lead to formulating strategies that facilitate problem-solving. This notion of democratic dialog is central to my action and therefore, I feel it necessary to underscore one of the ideological foundations, on which, I have based my investigation.

According to Philips and Huzzard, the democratic dialog is a work method that facilitates discussion between participants, because their contribution is valued equally and that the arranged discussion stimulates participation. The dialog gives the opportunity for different dimensions of learning, for example listening, making oneself understood, participating a democratic discussion and learning how one learns. Dialog, last but not least, is an opportunity for collective learning. The term “democratic” is connected to the right and responsibility of all those affected, to be a part of the discussion, to cooperated through dialog.

Another strong motivation for choosing this oral approach, rather than the letter method advocated by Gunnar Berg, is based on indications I have gotten earlier from team members that they hope my action will not mean a lot of extra work for them. By asking them to spend time writing letters would be adding an extra burden on them and I could possibly risk not getting adequate input. Another reason for choosing this method is that it is more immediate and direct and given the small number of participants this is a preferable and manageable approach.

Another very important factor is that not all of the members feel at ease about writing in English and/or in Swedish, for that matter, due to the fact that they are native-speaker teachers in their respective languages. It always requires extra time and effort for non-Swedish speakers to express themselves at length in writing, with accuracy, clarity and ease. Then there is an additional dimension, that, what they write becomes official data for my report and is seen as documentation, which demands a greater level of formality in their written language. I do not want to create any resistance in their willingness to cooperate in the project and see the oral approach as the most accessible and agreeable.

Most importantly, I feel that I do not want to run the risk of not getting enough written input from the start and then have to go back and ask for more, in which case there could be a negative reaction. I want to ensure getting as positive a response as I possibly can and not antagonize or overburden anyone. By allowing everyone to speak her/his mind freely and leaving the task of recording what transpires to me, makes the project much more manageable, from my teammates perspective, although my fear is that this method might lack the structure and formality required for such research.

3.3.3 Interview

Before choosing the interview method, one must understand that the interview situation is considered by many to be an extremely demanding method for both the researcher and the interviewee. Firstly, it requires that the interviewer understands how the interviewee perceives her/his situation and the interviewer must be prepared to follow up the problem areas that come up in the interview, to be able to bring forth interesting and important facts. (Holme and Solvang, (1991, p. 105). It is equally important that the interviewer is convincing in showing the interviewee that she/he is being listened to and taken seriously. This can lead to a situation characterized by trust and is based on willingness. The environment is also important, where the interviewee feels comfortable and all the equipment functions, so that the interview can be natural. In the interview, one can also gain access to the interviewee's awareness, in order to develop and get a picture of her perception and experience. (Stensmo, 2002, p. 119) Stensmo refers to Kvale's book, entitled *InterViews*, which can be translated as, between-views or between two sighted (seeing individuals). Kvale means that the interview is an exchange of viewpoints between two individuals, who discuss a topic of common interest. (Stensmo,

p120) The interviews serve as an important complement to the round-table discussions, in that they can reveal valuable opinions and thoughts that might not, otherwise, be expressed in front of the group.

In my action, the interviews will be done according to Kvale's seven phases of qualitative research interviewing, which are:

Thematic development – involves theoretical reflection in the subject of the research and formulation of the questions: What – to gain background knowledge, Why – to clarify the aim of the research, and How – to determine the best interview and analysis technique to employ.

Planning – is the preparation of the methodical procedure, which will be used to obtain the desired knowledge/information.

The interview (actual) – means that the interviewer seeks access to the interviewees (inner)-world.

Transcription – means that the interview material is transcribed from an auditive/spoken form to written form, if tape recorded, and the interviewer should listen again to that which has been said in the interview.'

Verification – answers the question of how generally the results can be interpreted, as well as, how reliable and valid they are. Reliability has to do with the way the questions are asked and whether the interviewer's questions are leading and steer the interviewee in a certain direction. Validity is concerned with how precise and carefully the interview is carried out. Does the interviewer do what she says she is going to do? Any mistakes that occur in the course of the interview must be accounted for.

The Report- starts with an introduction where the theme development and the research questions are presented, followed by a detailed method section. This is where the planning is presented; the selection of informants/interviewees; what information has been gathered beforehand; the actual interview situation; the questions asked; and the atmosphere/climate, which exists, etc. All details do not need to be included but the report should be well structured and citations/quotes should be short and not comprise more than half of the remaining text, in the result section.

3.4 Validity and reliability

No matter what method one chooses in collecting data, the data must be reliable, have reliability and be valid, have validity. Validity or agreement is a measure of how an investigation measures that, which is being measured. (Stensmo, 2002) High reliability exists,

if different and independent methods of measuring the same phenomena give approximately the same results, which does not have the same degree of importance in qualitative investigation, due to the fact, that the representation of statistics play a less important when the aim is comprehensive/global understanding. In using qualitative methods the researcher has less of a problem at gathering valid information, due to the closeness to the participants. (Holme, Solvang, 1997)

Andersson, Herr & Nihlen cite in their book, *Studying Your Own School – An Educator’s Guide to Qualitative Practitioner Research* (1994) maintain that the criteria for “validity” in practitioner research is different for practitioners who organize their research around specific problems within an action context, in contrast to, practitioners who research to produce knowledge for dissemination in fairly traditional channels (i.e. dissertations, journals, etc.). They characterize action research as transformative in nature (i.e. linked to some kind of action to change educational and/or institutional practices), and therefore, should be judged on other criteria, such as: democratic validity (to what extent the research is done in collaboration with all parties who have a stake in the problem under investigation), outcome validity (the extent to which actions occur that lead to a resolution of the problem under study, i.e. “successful outcome”), process validity (refers to the “dependability” and “competency” of the study and is directly linked to outcome validity in that, if the process is flawed or superficial, the outcome will reflect it), catalytic validity (is the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses and energizes participants towards knowing reality, in order to transform it) and dialogic validity (in academic research circles, the “goodness” of research is monitored through peer review/a dialog with peers). In the discussion section of this paper, I will attempt to judge the validity of my action in relation to these five criteria.

3.5 Research ethics

It is important when doing research work that the researcher take careful ethical consideration and decisions. This means that there are boundaries for the freedom of researchers and ethics becomes even more important for social researchers because the research involves people. According to Stensmö (2002) there are four criteria that must be met, in order for the research to be ethically sound, namely: consent, confidentiality, information and intellectual property rights/copyright. I have adhered to these in my action. Being that all the participants are

adults, obtaining consent was resolved easily and the participants were informed of the scope of their participation and that it was voluntary. Concerning confidentiality, and given the small number of participants there is a great demand for; anonymity and respect for the integrity of the individual, therefore, in recording and reporting the round-table discussions it is of utmost importance that I describe events and/or individuals, in such a way as to not reveal anyone's identity. Consequently, I take care to ensure that no one is referred to by name. I addressed the issue, at the initial meeting and then reiterated its importance before conducting interviews. The interviewees were reassured that all the information gathered was to be strictly used for purposes of my research and report, so that no one, individually, would be exposed or criticised for their ideas or actions.

To ensure that what I find is as truthful and correct as possible, it is important that I not simply try to justify my original plan by supporting my initial theoretical understanding and ambition, with the information/findings I obtain from the discussions, as they evolve. This would not serve any real purpose, for the team or me. Getting to the truth by acknowledging and establishing, where the team is, where it wants to go and how far it has been able to go, is the only way of gaining meaningful knowledge and to truly learn. My intention is to reveal the truth about the status and ability of the team to strengthen its profile, by producing findings that reflect and mirror the facts, as accurately as possible, even if that turns out not to be what I assume, from the outset.

To sum up, I, as a professional teacher, am learning/doing action research by using my own (dialogue-based, participatory) practice in the hopes/aim of qualifying the teacher team by applying an action learning program.

4 Implementation of the action and results

Here, I will outline the preparation for the action, the implementation and carrying out and give the time frame of the action. The context and boundaries will be presented, in addition, the time constraints and changes made in scheduling. To give a picture of the status of the team before the action and put the action into context, the team's background will also be outlined. My introduction and the subsequent series of round-table discussions are summarized under separate headings. Unexpected problems that arose are also included in this section. In addition, I will provide a summary and reflection of the follow-up interviews that were done, the following term. Finally, a description of the status of the team after the action will be described. In planning, I have used the spiral model to depict the sequence of activity as a fluid, circular process of formulating the problem/questions, engaging in team dialog, summarizing and evaluating and then, formulating new questions in a continuous spiral, although my action was finite and limited, in both, scope and time.

4.1 Context and boundaries of the action

The weekly ELP meetings, was the arena for my action. These one-hour meetings normally took place mid-week, at the end of the workday, following language lessons. The appointed team leader was informed that the action was sanctioned by the administration and that the team, itself, was going to be the focus of my action and that several team meetings would be needed to carry it out. This was to include all five team members and would be limited to the time frame normally adhered to for teacher team meetings.

The series of four discussions involved in my action took place within the context of these regularly scheduled meetings and time was set-aside for this purpose, so no additional meetings were, therefore, scheduled. The discussion series took place over a period of several months. The meeting with the administration took place on a separate occasion and was neither in conjunction with the team meeting nor in a group context, but held between the principal and myself.

Time frame of the action was as follows: Autumn 2006 to Spring 2007

November 25, 2006	presentation of the action with a pre-discussion of the context of the action and my intentions with it.
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- December 1, 2006 presentation of the concept of action research along with an oral and written outline of the action plan, together with a menu of questions for discussion, followed by the first round- table discussion of the central questions.
- January 15, 2007 meeting with school principal regarding his views of: the current and future role of the ELP team, my Masters action and the appropriateness of the action within the team and in regards to school development.
- February 2, 2007 summary of previous discussion followed by a second round-table discussion of team status and what the team, strategically, needs to do, can do and will do. Note: This meeting was moved back from January 26, 2007, due to an internal crisis.
- March 23, 2007 decide a course of action that the team should take based on the discussion (around new questions) that had arisen and perhaps, formulate additional questions.

An unexpected development, which will be clarified later in this section and analysed in my discussion, drastically changed the original action plan. This resulted in the January 26th meeting being moved back to February 2nd. The final meeting took place on March 23rd, where resolution on the two main issues, which had crystallized during the course of the action, was achieved. These issues concerned; firstly - defining what a teacher team, actually, should be and secondly - whether or not a team leader was needed to head up the team. The strategic problem, as originally formulated, as the basis for my action, had, in effect, been tabled in deference to the critical structural issues, which had to be resolved before the team could move forward. This turn of events was unforeseeable and totally unexpected, on my part and the administration's.

4.2 Context and background of the team

4.2.1 Evolution of the team prior to the action

In my opinion, a friendly, non-hierarchical, informal, professional atmosphere, in general, characterizes our school culture, where teacher teamwork is based on open dialogue, creative

freedom, sharing of ideas and pedagogical experimentation. More specifically, in looking at the structure of the Eureka and PBL teams, they operate without a team leader and make decisions democratically, while the ELP team has a team leader, who was appointed by the administration. This appointment was made on the premise that the language team needed a leader to oversee implementation of the new portfolio methodology. The ELP team, prior to this point, was a loose-knit structure, which did not have a clear identity or common basis for cooperation, which was the implied goal of the administration, when the team leader was appointed and put in place.

This issue of an appointed team leader has become a central issue in the round-table discussions. Growing negative sentiment to having a team leader came to the surface. One can say that it has sidetracked my action and shifted the intended focus from looking forward and developing strategy - to forcing us to most immediately address structure rather than content. The team quickly went into a self-ransacking, blame-storming mode, due to a number of circumstances, which caused the team, as such, to be dissolved. This will be described in more detail later in the action.

The Eureka team is comprised of the Swedish, civics, history, geography, natural science, religion and intercultural communication teachers, who work with subject integration and collaborate their efforts thematically. English A and B was part of Eureka at its inception.

This collective of French-German-Spanish teachers was operative for two years, prior to my inclusion into the ELP team, which was then further expanded one year later to include my English colleague from our sister school. Thus, the forming and reforming of the team has taken place over a longer period of time and now includes five team members representing two schools and five nationalities.

Administrative demands placed upon the team to perform and collaborate have been externally and organizationally motivated, thereby, being superimposed and somewhat superficial. The reason for being a team, and the inherent need to closely collaborate have been difficult for individual team members to grasp and internalise. It has not been as clear-cut and easy for the language teachers to find common pedagogical ground and natural areas of integration, in our daily praxis or in strategic planning, as it has been for the other two teacher teams. There are a number of reasons for this but I will not speculate on that here.

The feeling of team spirit is rather weak amongst the majority of its members. This has now come to the attention of the administration. In acknowledging this problem they have recognized that efforts must be made to address this issue and the administration is working to find solutions in theory, although the team does not seem to be getting the amount of support it needs, in practice.

In recent individual, annual staff evaluation meetings, between administration and personnel, two team members have voiced sentiments of disenchantment and frustration with the inner workings and development of the ELP team. This predicament has forced the administration and the team itself to address these problems openly, albeit individually.

I wanted to find a way to unify the team so we could move forward, by focusing on the strategic work with the new curriculum that can give us a stronger international profile and something very real to rally around, rather than staying focused on practical, day-to-day issues concerning methodology, themes, etc. We have a unique potential to be a part of influencing school development and forging a stronger team through actively exploring what our role can be, by finding ways that the new program could make a difference for the team and the school. This is a pivotal time and a unique opportunity for my action to come into play.

With a new curriculum being implemented next year, the administration has decided to put focus on language, with a capital “L”, in a concerted effort to strengthen internationalisation, with a capital “I”. Inherently, the ELP team is well positioned to be able to capitalize on that decision since there are many factors, which could unify this team and draw on its unique qualities, some of which I identify here:

- All are mother-tongue teachers.
- All bring strong cultural identities, traditions and norms, to the team.
- All have good levels of assimilation into the Swedish workplace.
- All have international (non-Swedish) degrees of higher education.
- All have some level (from fair to excellent) of Swedish language proficiency.
- All possess unique cultural perspectives of Swedish society, school and culture.

Clearly, there is a tremendous potential for a multicultural, international perspective that is stimulating, exciting and above all an educational asset that can enhance the school, the students and the program we offer. But to do that the team needs to delineate and sharpen its

identity in order to be able to contribute to school development. My aim, together with the team, is to find unifying elements, which can draw us closer together in order to meet the challenges of the future.

4.3 Presentation of the action plan

As the starting point of the action, I presented, a brief and general outline of the subject of my action and explained that it was our teamwork and adapting the ELP team to the new curriculum that would be the focal point in a series of round-table discussions. I made it clear that, as part of my Masters program, I was required to carry out an action project within the context my own professional work arena and that was why I was asking them to actively participate and get their consent. I told them that I would explain what is meant by action research at the following meeting, which was officially the beginning the action project and that they should be mentally prepared to be involved in the action, itself, then. I wanted to familiarize the team with the notion that, together, we would be the subject of the action, which required their cooperation and direct participation. By stressing that we had an opportunity to try to bring the team closer together through delineating our new mission and consolidating our praxis, we could better validate our team within the school. The emphasis was on the positive effects this could have for both the team and the school.

There was some apprehension expressed, at first, by team members as to what impact this was going to have on them, individually, and/or the team, as a whole, in terms of additional work or extra meetings. Members were concerned about how much of their time, over and above the regularly scheduled teacher's meetings, was going to be required. There was also some inquiry, at this point, as to whether the action would place greater demands on them, such as extra duties or responsibilities, in the form of writing reports or other types of documentation. I needed to clarify that all the necessary writing and documentation would be done by me, the practitioner researcher. So, once I assuaged their fears, there was an expressed, albeit cool willingness to cooperate and engage in the round-table discussions.

Curiosity, on the part of the team members, surfaced gradually so I gave some examples of the types of issues we would be discussing, such as: How do we see ourselves in terms of a team; What is unique about our team; How do we want to work as a team; What obstacles are

there for working as a team; Can we find methods of working that will benefit the team, What is the mission of our team; What defines us as a team, etc.? These gave a general indication of the types of questions that would be up for discussion. (See appendix 2)

Some inquiries were made regarding the intention and purpose of the action and there was some reservation expressed, as to whether this would in some way negatively impact the position, posture or reputation of the team, in relation to the other teacher teams or the administration. There were some concerns raised about how this action could damage the overall existing collegial relationship and/or, in any way, compromise the team's existing image. The greatest trepidation was the fear of antagonizing anyone within the school, which could bring about unwanted consequences. Therefore, it was of utmost importance to assure the team that this was, in no way, intended to compare and contrast the ELP team with the other teacher teams. That the main purpose was to investigate and take an inventory, within the team itself, as to the potential we had for strengthening our own profile and praxis.

It was important to reassure the team that this had been sanctioned from the top and that the principal was aware of the focus and purpose of the action. That all the parties and levels, i.e. team members, team leader and administration; involved were convinced that this was not a provocation but rather an opportunity for positive change, was central to getting the team to cooperate. Had this not been established, I would not have had any credibility or cooperation in attempting my action.

Normally, the formalized use of a set agenda and recording of minutes is not standard practice, in the ELP meetings, although important decisions that are made are usually recorded in the "team binder", which functions as a record of decision-making activity on issues requiring team consensus. So as far as the action was concerned, the structure of the meetings was rather informal and this is relevant to the nature of my action, as the discussions held, were carried out in an informal round-table discussion format, where every team member was invited and required to voice her/his opinion, in a democratic fashion.

This initial, preparatory meeting gave rise to a number of random queries that lead to a spontaneous discussion, which dealt with various issues that team members immediately began to openly inquire about, such as, whether each of us saw him/herself as (part of) a team. There were two members who felt that they were part of a team, although one of them

qualified that by adding that we, previously, had decided and agreed to do things in different ways, because of the fact that there were conflicts and strong personality differences. These personality differences were an obstacle to agreeing on how to implement common praxis, therefore, it was easier to just develop individual methods and praxis, rather than trying to come to a consensus regarding pedagogical classroom teaching and strategic planning, etc.

The other two members were of an opposing opinion on the question of whether they saw us as a team or not. One of them chose to pose her response from the perspective of the students, in saying that she felt that students do not see ELP as a team and added that the other teacher teams do not really see us, either, as a team. This is partly due to the fact that everyone in ELP works individually with, for example: checklists, setting grades and strategically planning their course syllabi on a day-to-day and long-term basis. She maintained, that there is little cooperation between language teachers when it comes to the on going, practical teaching or pedagogical work, for that matter. The other team member, who also did not feel as though we were a team, specified by saying that she belongs to the ELP team, which is physically based at the one school but in reality she teaches at the other sister school, which is located in another building and uses the PBL methodology - so there is very little that she has in common with the team, except sharing the some of the same students.

She went on to make the observation, that in fact, not all of us teach the same groups of students and this creates a natural barrier to planning across theme-lines or subject-lines, seeing as the modern (foreign) language teachers have completely different groups of students based on proficiency levels. To complicate matters, even further, the two team members that teach core curriculum courses, e.g. English A and B, have completely different constellations of students from the modern language teachers. Consequently, the English teachers can cooperate in pedagogical planning and working thematically but the modern language teachers find this extremely difficult, if not prohibitive.

Then the discussion, without any prompting or suggestion on my part, moved on to another area, when one teacher said; “We need to define ourselves in terms of team and what we actually mean by team, because we are different from the other two teacher teams. Therefore, we need to delineate in which ways we are a team, not focus on the ways we are not and try to concentrate on that which can knit us more closely together.”

Then, one of the team members attempted to bring clarity to the discussion by illustrating what we were talking about on the whiteboard. The figure below, according to one teacher, attempts to show how the teacher teams are seen on the surface and how they are configured, in actuality, under the surface. It suggests that, on the surface one perceives three separate but similar entities, as represented by circles, and seen from the perspective of the students, administration, parents, etc. Here, all the teams are seen as basically the same. This symbolizes the external perspective, while below the surface the internal perspective, as seen from within the ELP team, itself, shows the team members connected to the outside of the circle, whereas the PBL and Eureka members are inside their respective circle.

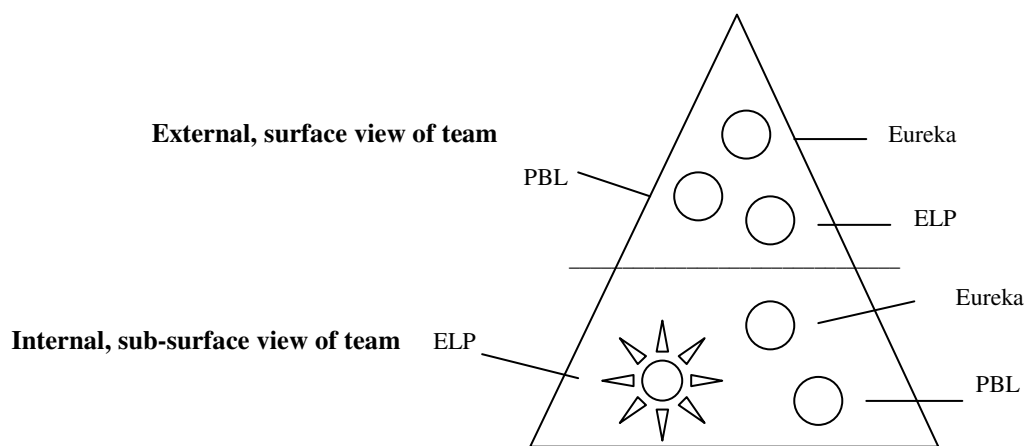


Figure 2 External view shows that all teams look the same, with all team members inside their respective circle, while the internal view of ELP shows the team differs in structure, insofar as the team members are attached to the outside of the circle.

The external view shows that all teams look the same, with all team members inside their respective circle, while the internal view of ELP shows the team differs in structure, insofar as the team members are attached to the outside of the circle, as separate satellites.

This diagram was useful in visualizing the position of the team members in relationship to their team, where upon it become apparent how we are, in fact, different in our basic composition, both physically and mentally.

A team member metaphorically reflected on the diagram above by saying; “There is an undeniable law of justice when it comes to having the same chance of succeeding or

possessing the same prerequisites when asked to fulfil a task. Consider this: “Who will succeed best, given the situation where both are told to climb the same tree? An elephant or an ape?”

The discussion logically moved on and another question was raised: “What unites us as a team?” There was not really any response to that question, but rather another question was asked: “What are the duties and responsibilities of the team?” Several areas were mentioned, such as: having a clear coaching/guiding role for the students and being confident in the setting of grades and marking students. Due to a lack of time, this topic did not get expanded on any further.

As time was running out and the discussion had moved along, unobstructed by me, and the fact that it had touched on many different tangents, I felt it necessary to summarize what we, now, more clearly understood, as a result of the day’s discussion. At the end of the meeting, I asked the group to identify areas that needed reiterating and summarizing. They agreed that there were two primary areas: to define the responsibility of the team leader and the need to have a clearer profile, within the school. At the end of the first round-table discussion, we identified the following points that had been clarified and what we could continue with next time.

The responsibility of the team leader is to:

- Assume the role of coach for the team members
- Insure that all team members have a similar view of their teaching mission
- Insure that all team members interpret course goals in a similar fashion
- Follow up and follow through on the ELP Work Plan that we formulate/write together
- Lastly, on the point about being more visible/having a higher profile in the future, these areas were specified as potential areas for cooperating/coordinating. It was felt that we could strive to have: common examinations, evaluations, checklists, grading criteria, theme days, field/study trips and common Christmas Shows.

The meeting ended, with a member applying an appropriate metaphor to the above listing of common goals to strive for, by comparing the ELP team to a soccer team. He said, “The members of a soccer team use the same, identical uniform in a match, but the left wing defence does not do the same things as an offence player. They may look the same but they do very different things.” This can be interpreted in several ways but I believe the point in context was that we do not have to act the same and strive to be identical but we can still have a common goal of winning, in a team effort, at the end of the day.

My observation and reflection

I was surprised that the team had begun to engage in dialog with very little prompting on my part, at this point, being that the actual starting point for the action was not officially until the following week. Firstly, this indicated that the team was, in fact, eager to address pertinent questions and secondly, that they were willing to discuss issues openly that would or could be recorded and serve as empirical data that potentially would become part my report. In doing so, the team directly addressed what they felt was the heart of the issue and begin to openly discuss this.

Another interesting thing I observed was their desire and willingness to clarify and come to agreement as to how we perceived ourselves, at that time. The level of involvement in the discussion was surprisingly high. It become obvious that the issue of how the team was perceived by those outside the team was, in fact, an issue that everyone was thinking about. It was also clear that there was an immediate need to draw parallels and make comparisons. The need to find patterns of similarities/differences and exceptions to the rule, within organizations, is common human behaviour, according to Hans-Åke Scherp, who talked about this in a lecture on Problem-based school development, in Helsingborg in 2005.

Needless to say, I was looking forward to the next meeting and thought, at this point, that the team was on board with my action and willing to cooperate in discussing openly, the problems facing the team and that they were genuinely interested in exploring, together, potential areas of change and development.

4.4 Round-table discussion – nr 1

I began the round-table discussion; by presenting the team with a brief explanation of what action research is and outlined the design, scope and my intentions with the project. Team members were not familiar with the concept of action research; therefore, it was necessary to explain it and the difference between action research and traditional research (See appendix 2)

In my presentation, two descriptions of action research were given, one by Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1998) and one by Zuber-Skerrit (1992). (See appendix 1) This was done to highlight the nature of action research and to validate my own position as practitioner researcher. I talked about how this project can benefit the team and its development. A short description

and overview of the plan was presented in writing, along with a menu of questions, in both English and Swedish. (See appendix 3 and 4). The team was given the opportunity to respond and ask questions and even encouraged to consider adding any questions that they, personally, thought were relevant to the upcoming discussions. No additional questions were added, at this point, but they were invited to bring any to the next discussion.

To elicit a response and get the team to see that they could influence the content and relevancy of the discussions I invited them to give feedback on the menu of questions, as I did not want them to feel as though I was dictating or owned the content of the discussions. I invited them to contribute, delete or amend questions so as to allow them to become part of the process of determining and owning the issues, according to what he/she felt was important. This was the quickest way of entering into a democratic dialog, which I referred to earlier, in the theoretical section. They said that there were enough questions on the menu that were relevant, and so they did not feel they needed to add any.

The questions were presented in menu form and the team was asked to decide which question was the most imperative to start with. Not knowing exactly how this was going to go, I anticipated that there might be some uncertainty from the team members, so in the event of them not coming to a consensus on which question to address first, I had chosen two that I thought would be useful in getting the discussion off in a positive direction. These two were: what is unique about our team? and what do we want to achieve as a team? I chose to not verbalize either of these but rather waited for a team response. So, after some consideration, the group decided that the most relevant one and the question that was in the back of everyone's mind was quite simply – Do we want to be a team? In my opinion, this was a rather loaded question but I had to let the team decide what was relevant.

The question was posed and the discussion went around the table. The responses were spontaneous and the ideas expressed were quite varied. A summary follows.

The first remarks were formulated from a positivist perspective and avoided answering that question directly. One member's comments centred on a number of ideal notions of her optimal vision of a functioning team, which listed as: "the exchange of ideas, openness and honesty and helping one another with pedagogical issues". She expressed that she did not feel that this was the prevailing atmosphere within the team. These were the elements that she

envisioned and hoped for in team collaboration but did not find to be the case with our team. She felt that the team was lacking cohesion and team spirit - where sharing, assisting and collaborating with one another was basically non-existent, from its inception up to now.

A second team member expressed the belief that we must have a team for the language teachers, otherwise; where and what would we be. We would just be a loose-knit collection of individuals. Then it was added that, "We must improve the quality of the language teaching at our school. We are more professional now that we all use portfolio, even if we are four different subjects that are not integrated."

Then, the third member added to the discussion by summarizing, in effect, the progress that has taken place over the last two years. A number of points were made to support the notion that being a group was, in fact, a positive thing. This team member proceeded to identify the following factors, by saying: "when looking back at how it was four years ago, everyone worked by themselves, there was quite a bit of competition between us and prestige in trying to excel; also, with the forming of ELP, we have become more cohesive, working on the same plateau, we are talking the same language (professional), which has put us more on the same level." She went on to comment, by adding: "Now we can start to focus on the fun and creative challenges that will provide a common context to unite us in our work and give us a unified profile within the school and to the outside world." Lastly, this comment was made, "In addition, we must get help from the administration, namely the principal, to write the Annual ELP Work Plan. We need help with formalities of formulating the document and the language."

Lastly, the fourth member had a lot to say on this question, by taking up a number of issues concerning, whether or not she wanted to have an ELP team. She expressed the following points: "We would not be able to function very well, individually, if we weren't a teacher team; We all have preconceived notions of what a team should be and how we should work together; We must, can and shall work together as a team."

She went on to talk about her expectations, by saying: "Every week, I have anticipated and expected that the team would be working with pedagogical questions and more strategic issues." Next, she identified a weakness within the group, by adding: "We have a great potential with this team but we must let go of the idea that the other two teacher teams, i.e. PBL and Eureka, function better than we do. She went on to a more positive note, by

delineating possible ways of cooperating with each other, by suggesting: “We can have theme-based integration across language lines, but we can never have subject-integration, because of the fact that, on the one hand, we do not have the same students and on the other hand, we have so many levels of proficiency (scale levels 1 – 7) to cater to. The issues brought up here were complex and would require much further discussion and being that time was running out, these points were not pursued further.

Towards the end of the meeting, it was decided to make a list of the most important areas for the team to focus on, in an attempt to bring some clarity and resolution to the discussion that had just ensued. There was a general consensus that there needed to be more structure to our meetings that would help us to be more effective, in the short-term and the long-term work. In so doing, we could begin to look at ways to strategically develop a more stable platform for pedagogical improvement and team development. We needed more accountability and documentation in our meetings, as well as, regular follow-up.

It was agreed that concrete steps were needed to better structure the work of the team in future meetings and that it was imperative that these things be put in place. These are the points that were articulated, agreed upon and written up at the end of the round-table discussion.

- Meetings need to be documented
- Meetings need structure
- Tasks need to be delegated within defined areas of responsibility
- The team leader needs to lead
- The team leader needs to support all team members in their daily praxis and specifically, to provide support in the welcoming and integration of new team members to the ELP team

The meeting ended and it was agreed upon that the next round-table discussion would continue to explore how the team would implement these areas that had now been identified as necessary for the continued existence of the team and for the advancement of a team that we would all want to be a part of.

My observation and reflection

This discussion touched upon many issues relating to the central question, namely - whether we wanted to be a team or not. With many viewpoints and perspectives coming forth we were all able to vent a number of burning issues that needed to be raised, shared and openly discussed. The atmosphere was hopeful and there was a general feeling of optimism when

team members were able to articulate their frustrations and identify obstacles in the path of genuine team collaboration. It was pointed out, that the lack of structure, the lack of leadership and the lack of enthusiasm, was the result of being a collection of individuals with no real purpose in functioning as a team, and this was expressed in a number of ways. The notion of forced collaboration that Hargreaves talks about seems to be applicable here.

Discussing this question allowed the team to clarify and identify an area that demanded immediate addressing. Although, the question is inherently naïve in its formulation, as this is not an issue for us to make a decision on. The administration was responsible for forming the team, in the first place, and this was an organizationally motivated step that had not been initiated by the language teachers, themselves, but rather mandated from above. As I described earlier in the evolution of the team, its forming and existence was mainly an organizational strategy to group all the staff into working teams that could collaborate on one level or another. Being a team is an unavoidable state of existence and a fact, at this time and the decision to continue to exist in this constellation is not ours, really but the administration's. So, if we in fact, do not want to be a team then the question must be taken to the next level and dealt with there, or if we want to be a team with a different structure than we must define what that would be and obviously, we would need to get consent and approval from the administration. This is not something that we can decide ourselves but certainly can influence a change in some way.

4.5 Meeting with principal

The main purpose of this meeting was two-fold. Firstly, I needed to inform the principal of the nature, aims and design of the action. I wanted to have a guarantee that the principal sanctioned this action and get assurance that there were no obstacles, as far as the administration was concerned, to carrying out my action, as planned. I knew that the principal was supportive, as it was, partially, on his initiative that I joined this Masters program, in the first place. I have kept the administration abreast of my progress over the last four and half years, so I knew that, in principle, there would not be any objections to carrying out an action, but I needed to be certain that this particular project was in keeping with the overall goals of the administration and would in no way conflict with the strategy for development of the ELP team, as he saw it.

Secondly, my intention was to get any and all expert advice that I could from the principal. Being that the nature of the project, i.e. studying my own teacher team, involved taking a deep-dive into the internal organizational structure and dealing with issues directly concerning school development, I hoped that he would have expert input and share his knowledge about working in this area. What I was looking for, primarily, was that he would be able to identify any major danger signs ahead and flag these for me, so that I could avoid any unnecessary problems or pitfalls. As I am a novice to action research, it seemed most appropriate to rely on the expertise, knowledge and many years of experience that he has in dealing with school development and working with teachers and teacher teams.

I stressed the delicacy of the project and I solicited his input and comments. I explained that I planned to use was a round-table discussion method. I was unsure about whether he would view this method as reliable and adequate in collecting the empirical data that I need from the team. The principal considered my reservations and accepted my arguments and said he saw no problem with this method.

Once I got the principal's approval to proceed with the action, I went on to solicited ways in which the administration could assist me, to make sure that what we were doing was in keeping with school strategy. I requested that the administration, meet with the ELP team at some point during the course of the action, as I anticipated there would be many questions from the team members that would arise, that only the administration could answer for us. In fact this had already happened and I informed him of some of the different aspects that had come up in the round-table discussions, so far. He agreed to meet with the whole team, at some point in the near future, although this did not happen during the course of the action.

I wanted to gain validity in the eyes of the team for the work I was initiating. By getting the administration to respond to my request to attend a teacher's meeting, where we needed to get strategic issues clarified, during the course of the round-table discussions, I felt would give me this validation. The meeting ended and he wished me luck in my endeavour.

My observation and reflection

My reflection after the meeting, was that I achieved what I had intended with this meeting, for the most part. I got the sanction to carry on and the reassurance that my action was not in conflict with school policy or strategy. Although, the input I had hoped for, on how to

structure or design my action for maximum effect or success or for that matter, any specific tips or warnings on things to watch out for, I did not get. On the other hand, the principal did lend me some books on the subject of qualitative interview methodology that he thought could be useful. I drew the conclusion that I was on the right track with my action and that qualified input would have to come from my mentors in the masters program or from colleagues. I assumed that his reluctance to get into specific details about the design or intent of the action was really due to his not wanting to interfere, steer or influence the context or content of the action, as it was my project and my responsibility to formulate the question, as I saw fit, from the perspective of a team member.

In other words, I interpret this to mean that the administration, consciously, took the position of observer and facilitator rather than actor and initiator. This was to be seen as my action and one that would not be influenced by the ambitions and aims of the administration and would be allowed to reflect the opinions and resonate the voices from within the team, itself. I saw this as a professional stance on the part of the principal, even if I really had hoped for more input and suggestions on how to approach this daunting undertaking.

4.6 Round-table discussion – nr 2

The team leader postponed the originally planned meeting, by one week. At the opening of this meeting, the team leader explained that she and one other member of the team had met with the principal to discuss how the ELP team was to work with internationalisation, in the future and to get clarification on what could be done now, in the planning stage. According to the leader, this was the priority issue, which would be the main subject of this meeting. It should be noted here that the originally scheduled meeting was intended to be a round-table discussion, where we would further discuss one or some of the questions, from the menu (see appendix 3), as part of my action.

In light of the first round-table discussion, the team leader began the meeting by referring back to the discussion and summarized the outcome by saying that a consensus had been reached, on the question of whether or not we wanted to continue being a team and that the outcome was unanimous – Yes, we do want to be a team and work towards strengthening the team structure. Although, now according to the leader, there was another pertinent question,

which needed to be dealt with openly and that was the question of team leader. She asked, “Do the members of the team feel that we need a team leader or not?”

But interestingly, the discussion then quickly moved in another direction, to focus on the issue of internationalisation and the leader presented a diagram symbolizing the team in the shape of a heart with the four languages represented as four separate islands within the heart and in the center of the heart there was a circle with a list of suggested areas for our international focus. They were areas, such as; common language theme-days, theatrical themes/theatre visits, mutual examination days, international trips, guest speakers, common (methodology) themes/packets. This diagram and these suggested areas, as presented to us by the leader, were then talked about in an attempt to emphasize that internationalisation was priority #1 and were proposed as ways that she thought we could achieve a clear profile, by implementing any number of these in a consistent and concerted effort. The leader presented these as work areas we could rally around and where we could find mutual areas for collaboration, cooperation and development.

Once this had been presented by the team leader and discussed to some extent, albeit rather superficially, the team leader then took up the sensitive issue, again, of whether the individual team members saw the necessity of having a team leader for ELP. The leader prefaced this discussion by indicating that she did not want to have the roll of “policeman” within the team and that she had made her position clear to the administration. The leader indicated a desire to be more of a “project leader” within the team, instead. The issue of whether to have a leader or not, was now defused by the leader’s declaration and, at that point, the question was really sidestepped.

Once again, there were a number of other points made regarding on-going planning and the team leader gave us feedback, on several topics, which she and the administration had conferred on. These topics, concerned the on-going work of the team, including:

- Electronic student evaluations of the foreign language themes/teaching, etc.
- Approval by the administration that individual team members would continue to work, individually and in different ways, with checklists and other areas of methodology and pedagogical experimentation.

Up to this point, it was primarily the team leader who spoke, without any real open discussion. Then it was reiterated by the leader that the team had, in fact, decided in the

previous meeting that we had all agreed that we wanted to continue to be a team. With that said, there were no dissenting voices on this point and so the original question, posed at the opening of the meeting, was readdressed – “Do we want to have a team leader for the ELP team?”

In order to discuss this properly, one of the team members suggested that we employ De Bono’s “six thinking hats” method of discussion, to ensure that all voices will be heard, so that many aspects of this issue can be dealt with openly and critically. Everyone agreed on the method and a discussion ensued.

The team then proceeded to explore the issue by defining what the positive and negative features are that characterize a team leader. This exploration took place in a congenial and supportive manner where the objective was clear and the task, at hand, a critical one.

Here is a summary of the team’s view of the positive and negative aspects of having a team leader and/or how the role of a leader can affect the development and work of the team:

Positive features	Negative features
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team is less divided • More structure to meetings • Quicker internal decision-making • Gather opinions and decisions (internal) • Communicate with administration • Practical responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader can easily influence decisions • Push through issues, according to own preferences (subjectivity) • Take less personal responsibility • Others can blame leader for failures • Less democratic

After listing and clarifying each one of these points, the discussion came back to the original question for this meeting, which was: “Do we want to have a team leader?” A vote was taken and the response was unified and everyone said - yes, they wanted to have a leader for the ELP team.

Then it was decided that the next logical thing to do now was to delineate what qualities or characteristics a team leader should possess, in order to be a good and effective team leader. Once again the discussion went around the table and we decided to employ the thinking hats method to be as objective and thorough as we could be.

We then proceeded to write a list of qualities on the board for everyone to agree on and if we did not agree then we needed to discuss that feature by motivating why or why not it was important to take up. Here are the characteristics that we agreed on:

- Receptive
- Patient
- Clear and unambiguous
- Lack of prestige or posturing
- Honesty
- Humility
- Tactfulness
- Flexibility

Once these qualities for a team leader had been clarified, the next thing was to take it one step further and define, in more specific terms, what the team leader should do. Now we had come to the task of outlining what we all saw as the most important functions of the team leader. Here is a list of the specific responsibilities that the team leader needs to assume when taking on the job:

- Collect ideas from all the team members
- Motivate and inspire team members
- Structure and lead the team
- Maintain contact with the administration and keep the team informed of administrative policy
- Be a spokesperson for the team
- Represent the team in practical contact situations, i.e. parent/student meeting, etc.

Now the team had come to a consensus on the stated responsibilities of the team leader and felt that this was an appropriate place to close the meeting.

My observation and reflection

First of all, this meeting was not fully within the boundaries of the action, insofar as it had been moved to another date and the rules of open, round-table discussion had, to a great extent, been changed. This was at least true, in the beginning of the meeting, when the team leader took command of the agenda and led the meeting with a rather lengthy presentation on the strategic input and feedback she had received from the administration on the issue of internationalisation. The topics she brought up were not in contradiction to the important strategic questions facing the team, in general, but the method and manner in which they were introduced, was not in keeping with my action. This meeting had, basically, been usurped and I was faced with no alternative than to see where it was going to go and hope that it would be constructive and lead us forward, along the path that had been paved by the previous round-table discussions.

The fact is, that in the second half of this meeting we did take up where we had left off in the previous round-table discussion. As I anticipated early on, the discussions would inevitably come around to some delicate internal issues that were bubbling under the surface. Once the sensitive issue of team collaboration or lack thereof, began to be openly talked about there was no way of avoiding the issue of leadership and collegial interaction. Showing initiative, the team leader took control of the agenda of this meeting, after having gathered strategic information and input from the administration, she decided to address the issue head on rather than having the team address it. The central question was now about whether we wanted a leader or not. The position of leader was clearly being attacked and criticised and so the leader's best defence was to go on the offence.

What is important to see here - is that discussion of the critical issue of leadership within the team was unavoidable. We all knew that that was the central issue for a number of team members, not all, and it needed to be resolved before the team could move forward and deal with the issues of strengthening its profile and concretely working toward school improvement. The internal struggle within the team needed to be addressed and the main obstacle for good collaboration was disharmony within the team. This had been worsened over time, due to a general reluctance to avoid confronting this fact, openly. Putting heads in the sand and not really confronting each other and questioning the reason for doing things the way we do, was a major stumbling block in team development.

This meeting had been extremely useful in airing the views of the individual team members and allowing many opinions to be raised and shared. There was a general feeling of accomplishment at the end of this meeting and an expressed sigh of relief that we had been able to openly speak our minds on what we expected from a team leader and what we did not appreciate and saw as counterproductive, if the team is going move forward and show that it, too, can be productive and contribute to the success of the school.

4.7 Round-table discussion – nr 3

More than one month has passed since the last round-table discussion. I began this meeting by giving the team the freedom to choose which question(s) we wanted to address, for this final round-table discussion. After some consideration, the team chose, from the menu, to center its

discussion on the question – “Can we find methods of working that will benefit the team and the school?”

We quickly established that we could and that the team already has a number of methods that we work with that do benefit us. The things that were taken up here, ranged from: - the ELP portfolio methodology, independence and self-reliance within the team, awareness, responsibility, and the ability to adapt and change. This was a rather loose list of things but helped in getting the discussion going, although there seemed to be difficulty in finding relevant and constructive answers to this question.

One team member made the observation that third year students do not follow the PBL or Eureka (theme based/subject-integrated) methodology, in contrast to their first and second year. On the other hand, they continue to work according to the ELP methodology, throughout years 1,2 and 3. It was pointed out that there is a disharmony in the distribution of methodologies at the two schools that can be an obstacle to finding good methods within the team and the school. This line of reasoning went a step further and raised the question – “Who benefits from these three methodologies (ELP, PBL, Eureka) that we use at our schools?” This became a bit confusing and so it was suggested that the original question be rephrased to approach the question from another point of view, namely the students. So the new question to be discussed was now – “Can we find methods that benefit learning and teaching?” At this point, the discussion became lively and many different perspectives were brought up and ideas for new forms contra old forms were discussed.

The focus now was on practical and pedagogical forms that were conducive to teaching and learning. One member said that we have already made the decision to work with portfolio because it enhances learning. We have experimented, and worked with it, but is there another methodology that is better? If so, then we should be working with that, instead. Perhaps we can find something else, but she said that she didn’t want to discard the portfolio methodology, because she felt it was too early to make that judgment. Besides, what do the students think about it? How do they learn best? We must find books in each of our respective languages that are designed for the portfolio methodology, which can both enhance our teaching and facilitate the students learning through the portfolio method.

Another teacher brought up the point of whether we should go back to using course books versus using our own individually designed theme packets. The number of students per class will increase in the future and using our own packets requires an enormous amount of time spent copying and paper costs are also mounting, not to mention the cost to the environment.

A third teacher, wondered how effective we can be as teachers, if we have large groups, of 25 students or more, at different proficiency stages in a classroom working with packets designed for a particular level for a specific period of time. How can we avoid holding back advanced students in their learning? One suggestion was to have extra MVG assignments, on hand, to motivate the more ambitious ones.

Another team member said that at her school the PBL team works only with rubrics. This was one useful method helping students to see what grade level they can aim for and aid them in being realistic in setting their goals and understanding what and how they are being assessed in each assignment or test.

Then it was point out that we may need to follow a thematic progression in teaching rather than a grammatical progression, in the future. She said that she now has more questions than answers! Another teacher countered by saying that we cannot avoid going back to using a course book, whereby, it was added that we probably would be using three different course books in the same classroom, in the future. The discussion was lively and continued to centre on practical, pedagogical issues such as combining any number of proficiency levels in one classroom and how this would be organized, schedule-wise and time-wise. Many aspects of the new curriculum seem daunting at this point.

As there was no possibility, in this meeting, to resolve the myriad of questions that came up and everyone seemed to become more frustrated as we spoke, we came to the realization that we needed clearer guidelines and direction from the administration. Many felt confused so it was decided that we would request a meeting with the administration to get a better picture of how the future will look and to get to know more about how the new program is envisioned by the principal. We do not know how it is going to be next year and by our own admission that has affected the team's motivation. We must not wait any longer, we must find out how the team can prepare itself for what is to come. We cannot do this alone - we must do it

together. The meeting ended by reminding the team that the word “team” stands for - together everyone achieves more!

My observation and reflection

Clearly there was a major shift in focus from the first two round-table discussions. Now the team was more settled and the inner conflicts, which existed at the beginning of the action, were not visibly present. There was a tacit agreement to move forward and the team chose to explore questions that required collective brain-storming and creativity, rather than blame-storming, in solving the externally induced problems, in the form of curriculum changes, which was now forcing each of us to re-evaluate our praxis and find new pedagogical approaches to new challenges. The challenges, unfortunately, are mostly seen as threats and problems, at this point. But with all of us facing them together there seems to be some consolation that we are not alone in this and somehow we will find solutions and deal with the problems as they arise and as we are confronted with them.

The team has resolved itself to forging forward and seems to find strength in banding together and seeing the external pressure from the administration as a unifying element, to some degree. The team has not been weakened, even if in reality it has not been strengthened, either. Undoubtedly, there is more stability in the team that has come through gaining a greater awareness of each other and the different roles that we assume within the team. We have come to see other qualities in each other, respect each other’s opinions more and better understand the positions and perspectives that we each hold, as well as, acknowledge that these individual roles and positions are fluid and changing. A greater tolerance was clearly evident along with a willingness to cooperate rather than compare, compete and contradict. Progress has clearly been made when I witness this desire to find ways of working together that did not exist before.

4.8 Follow up interviews

In to order to gain a better understanding of what affect, if any, the round-table discussions has had on the ELP team I conducted interviews with the members, individually. (See appendix 5) I wanted to find out if there have been any changes and, if so, what and for whom? Have the changes been positive or negative? I wondered if there have been any long lasting effects of the action and if the team has strengthened its international profile and thereby becoming a more viable catalyst for change.

After returning to the group one year later to conduct the interviews, I found that three members had a clear recollection of the discussions concerning the ELP team, in general, and that these focused on the issue of team validity, where the central issue was that we did not see ourselves as a team and as one said –“we had come to a dead end!” One team member could not recall specifically but remembered the discussion regarding the adaptation of a new track for foreign languages in the new curriculum, more specifically, that languages were going to enter into a new renaissance period and that foreign languages, through the Gy07 reform, would gain added value, although the proposition was killed along with the reform plan of the previous government.

Three of the team members thought that the most effective way to affect school development was through discussion within the teacher team and also between the different teacher teams and two of them, felt it was also important to include the administration in these discussions, if we are really going to have an impact. It was pointed out that leadership must give clear direction and guidelines, and continually update pedagogical development. One teacher said that for her, development came through dialog with students, in the form of their suggestions, feedback and evaluations of theme packets. Another way to be more effective in influencing development is by going on continuing education and professional development courses designed for teachers. One of the teachers said that to be more effective the team should have better structure, with some protocol, standard minutes and a set agenda. She also felt that the team needs to establish its profile and in order to do this it should have a document outlining what the team is, what it does, etc. “We need a brochure or some marketing tool to present and talk about externally. To gain a stronger international profile, we need to package ourselves!”

When asked if they could see any changes within the ELP team since the round-table discussions, the answers were varied and there were a number of different observations. The most obvious observation is that the team no longer has a team leader and that has meant that there is less tension within the team. As several members said, there’s a more positive atmosphere now because we are not told what to do, say or get judged. We have good contact with each other and work well, individually. Another said that, even though we discovered that we didn’t need a leader, we are still tight as a team. Another member said that the team members now have greater confidence in each other and they talk with each other but the fact

that they haven't developed as a team to any noticeable extent, confirmed this sentiment. The fourth member is no longer part of the team and has no contact with it and no knowledge of what ELP is doing. This member requested back then, one year ago, to only be required to attend ELP meetings every other week, because she was not gaining anything from attending them, as she had one foot in PBL and one foot in ESP. The point was made that meetings were not entirely democratic and not everyone's voice was heard, therefore they were not very productive. She suggested that we could have had an agenda and topics presented beforehand, so meetings could have been more effective, whereby there was more action and planning and less discussion. Overall, it was felt that there is a congenial atmosphere now amongst team members and the three remaining members respect one another but there is, in effect, no real team.

On the question of whether or not the team now has a stronger or clearer international profile, the response was nearly the same from the three members, who said that the team did not have a clear or strong profile. Two mentioned the fact that the team does not have regular meetings any more and that has weakened their profile – now we work parallel to each other, instead of more integrated. The goal to have a clear profile seems to have been abandoned, according to one. Another member summed it up this way, “now we are the modern language teachers, we teach in our individual languages and we have no regular meetings, we do everything individually. Actually, it's like it was before. ELP is just a label!”

Two of the members named Entrepreneurial Learning, when asked to give examples of school development initiatives, at our schools. One added the Habits of Mind Project (at Naturhumanistiska) and the Tandem Project (at JHS). Another teacher mentioned the changes being made in the Foreign Exchange Program and the instituting of the new two-track curriculum at JHS. One team member could not think of any recent developments.

When asked to give examples of school development within the ELP teacher team, itself, members gave responses that dealt more directly with the students. One said that flexibility in teaching, not being rigid and traditional was an example of this. Another mentioned that by involving the students more it gives them greater responsibility for their own development, for example, having them organize study visits to Lund's University to see how language teaching is at the university level. A third team member commented that with Entrepreneurial Learning coming into play, it may mean making changes in methodology/praxis.

When asked to give examples of school development that they had personally been involved in, one member, again, named the Habits of Mind and Entrepreneurial Learning projects.

Another member said that she had been involved in so many; there were too many to mention but the main thing has been abandoning traditional lecture-style teaching. A third talked about the current reformation work of the Foreign Exchange Program at JHS. The fourth member described collaboration with a local junior high school, where our students took responsibility for teaching a lesson to younger students at another school, thereby enhancing their confidence and ability to self-evaluate their language skills.

The teachers also answered the question –“What is characteristic for these school development initiatives that you teachers have been involved in?” It can be summed up in this way. One member said that, for teachers, leaving the traditional teaching role has meant a change in methodology but the road to knowledge is the same. It has meant that students have another role and take more responsibility for their learning and have more influence in the learning process. Another team member pointed to the fact that students can better learn how to identify what is needed to be a successful student/achiever and increase their own personal development.

“Relevant, Current (Trendy), Long-term vision” are three features that good school development should have, according to one teacher, who added that a combination of all three was essential, otherwise it’s just a fad. From another perspective, one member spoke about his personal goal of striving for quality in teaching and that he is trying to ensure that knowledge and learning is of a high quality. In his opinion, that is what good school development should be about. A third member felt that the most important thing was that she is able to influence school development as a teacher and that school development initiatives are not only coming from the top, down. No one wants to be a marionette, who is told what to do. She added that the interaction between teacher-student-team-administration is a vital characteristic of good school development.

Good school development is best achieved by including all levels of school organization, i.e. individual teachers, teacher teams and the entire school, was the opinion of two team members, who felt that it should be seen from a “whole school-team” perspective. But it was pointed out that the main responsibility of school development rests with the administration.

Another added that it is important to have three-way communication between all those affected, namely: teachers-students-administration. One member felt that different positions/posts should have different responsibility, respectively – all levels being equally important but each should take responsibility for his/her own area.

“What areas of school development should the teacher teams be working with and how should that school development be carried out?” This was a question that got a number of concrete suggestions. One response was that the teams could work with methodology, as a way to achieve change, by creating good conditions and a conducive work environment. Another member said that it was important to establish goals and work towards them, both organizationally and individually. What the team should focus on developing is to continually modernize our pedagogical approach. This member said it seems, nowadays, that gaining knowledge seems to be subordinate to developing competency, i.e. with entrepreneurial teaching. Lastly, it was outlined by a member that development work must have a plan, deadlines and documentation and that there should be a democratic distribution of shared duties within the team and if there is a team leader then he/she should have a more prominent role.

The final question in the interview was, “Whether it is important that the teacher teams have responsibility for school development and why? Two of the members felt that this was obvious and that all levels within the school had a responsibility, in direct correlation to their position. It was added, that we are all part of the school, so without teachers there wouldn’t be any school! One team member said that we must take responsibility, if it is mandated from the top we must take it and work together to achieve something. Another perspective on this was, if the teams are not given responsibility then they may not take school development seriously and elements of doubt may hold teams back from taking responsibility and taking risks. Our ambition level would drop if we were not given responsibility for school development.

My reflection

The follow-up interviews have given a clear indication that the team has significantly changed in a number of ways since the round-table discussions. When members had been given the opportunity to focus on ways of developing the team and finding methods to strengthen its international profile, in order to influence school development, they ran into a stumbling block. The members reflect on the fact that the most central issue was resolved through those

discussions, which has had a lasting impact on the make-up of the team. The team, in effect, questioned the need for a leader and saw this as an obstacle to developing and moving forward as a team. The need for more democratic dialog became apparent as the team addressed many issues that could not be satisfactorily dealt with, until inner balance and harmony was restored. So the restructuring process was a significant change for the better and allowed the team to come to terms with a more equal sharing of roles and responsibilities.

This was not without problems and the development of the team, perhaps, has not necessarily gone in the desired direction, from the point of view of the administration, which had appointed the team leader, in the first place. But the team became more aware of its weakness and through open and honest discussion has now achieved more stable work relationships, where a mindful atmosphere and collegial compatibility now exist. The members can continue to maintain a professional relationship with each other and work in a more relaxed environment and that is positive.

Even if the team profile has not been defined more clearly, in light of the new curriculum, there are many possibilities being considered and those options will begin to crystallize as the team moves forward with the restructuring the Exchange Program. Now that the old program has just come to an end, the team can begin to focus on long-term planning in this area, which will give the team a genuine area of school development to work with, which in turn will strengthen its profile and level of team cooperation. This is one concrete area of school development for the team to tackle and they are in a much better position to do that now.

5 Discussion

Now that I have given a detailed account of how the action was carried out and the results, as well as, my reflections, I will attempt to summarize my conclusions on how the attempts to strengthen the profile of the teacher team as a catalyst for development, actually turned out. I will then look at what is meant by the term *development* from a school improvement perspective and then reflect on how, the team and the administration, can continue to work to develop the team and its profile. Finally, I will describe what I have personally gained from doing research in my own field (school) and also what I could have done better and lastly, reflect on the validity of the project.

5.1 Strengthening the international teacher team profile as a catalyst for development

First of all, the team must be seen from a holistic perspective and not as an isolated entity, an island, if you will. To some extent the *Balkanization* of the teacher teams is an obstacle to team development, which in turn limits the ability of the team to influence over-riding school development. This isolation is, in part, due to an inability to find genuine and meaningful areas for collaboration between teacher teams that, if to succeed, must be based on the on-going, day-to-day praxis of teaching and motivating students. Natural links have to be found, where teams can identify mutual goals and develop strategies that bridge the content and contextual gap of pedagogical methodology that are compatible to both or all three teams, in some way. How can the ELP team achieve this? Is it the team's responsibility to find these natural links or does the responsibility lie with all three teams? Who will see to it, that this important work takes place? If the team cannot do it alone, where will the resources come from? These are important questions that must be posed to all the teams, where mutual solutions can be found, as a way of reducing Balkanization.

In trying to define and strengthen the team's international profile, it is equally important that this be part of the common agenda for the whole school staff. Here, collective brainstorming, to develop new strategies for internationalization through project work, can be seen through this lens and the collective resources of the school, as a whole, can be allocated with the consensus of all three teams. This not only allows for greater creativity, input and objectivity but as Hargreaves explains, it can also foster the change in relationships between colleagues, albeit, the culture's form, which can also change over time. To reiterate, he says, it is actually through the culture's form that the culture's content is realized, reproduced and redefined. To understand the teacher culture's form, therefore, means understanding the many limitations and opportunities, when it comes to changes in the school and the development of teacher's work.

One of the most important resources is time and that always seems to be in short supply. Time to meet, discuss, brainstorm, exchange ideas and explore possibilities and opportunities has to be systematically incorporated into overall planning. Time for the creative resources, which our dedicated staff possesses, to flourish and nurture cross-pollination, must be given greater priority in school development planning. In order to break this isolation, perhaps the other teams could be invited to find ways in which they can consider how they can better utilize and

benefit from different types of collaboration with the ELP team. This collaboration can lead to identification of new international projects and new roles.

Through structurally, encouraging and allowing the other teams to invite the ELP team in, where perhaps development work that the other teams have achieved and mastered can be shared in a spirit of collegial cooperation, for example in areas, such as rubrics and documentation/accountability in team meetings, etc. New ways of thinking about the ELP team by the others and what it has to offer can be explored and help in defining its profile.

Other advancements that the other teams have made, as well as, pitfalls they have discovered, in the areas of; team identification and profiling, team building, group dynamics and team development, can be an impetus for strengthening ELP and provide good examples that have been found to work, within our own organization. We need not go further than to our own colleagues, who can share the expertise that they have gained from their own experience and mistakes. But this is clearly an organizational/logistical/resource question that needs to be solved, first and foremost, on the administrative level. Prioritized focus, time and resources must be allocated for this to happen.

Another way in which the ELP team can be a catalyst in development on a school wide-basis is by focusing on the current opportunity and directive to find new strategies and forms for foreign projects. As mentioned earlier, the team recently ended the long-standing foreign exchange program, which was a corner stone of the old curriculum but has now been phased out. This opportunity offers the team a totally open and unexplored terrain that can be developed into very exciting and genuine projects. There are very little restrictions or guidelines set down by the administration, at this time. The teams have been given to mission of envisioning and developing new forms of exchange and international partnerships that can meet the needs of the school curriculum and which are compatible with course goals and fall within the limitations of personnel and financial resources. This mandate is a perfect opportunity for the team to take an inventory of their strengths and abilities, as well as, the overall organization, in developing projects that can become long-term partnerships for or lead to a broader international network.

On the other hand, in looking at obstacles that prevent the team from developing a strong profile, one must consider the problems that have already been touched upon in this report

and which are evident in the results of my action, namely the splitting up of the team last year and reducing it to the original three members. The innate nature of the team, albeit, its limited ability in integrating day-to-day praxis across subject or theme lines, remains an obstacle in achieving the kind of collaboration that is found in the other teacher teams. There is nothing that says that there has to be this kind of integration but other forms of cooperation and collaboration need to be developed, instead. On the other hand, some areas of cooperation have been achieved and are mentioned earlier, in the round-table discussion section, where the team has taken an inventory of ways that it can increase cooperation and strengthen its profile. The work of strengthening the team's profile, by developing good marketing tools that we can use to present our self, in a coherent and cohesive fashion, can also be a catalyst for both improving the image of the team and bringing clarity to the organization, as a whole. In some ways, the ELP team still seems to be the weak link in the organization.

Finally, on a micro-organizational level, the internal composition of the team can be likened to a mini-European Union. At the time of my action, we had five nationalities representing four different languages, which can have both a positive or negative affect on teamwork. The challenges that each member faces, individually, as a professional working in a non-mother-tongue environment, should not be marginalized, nor the fact that, as a team there are cultural aspects that can hinder communication and understanding. Working in a complex Swedish organization, where one is obliged to interface on many levels, with; colleagues, students, parents, administrators, external contacts, partners and so on, can pose great challenges, as this requires extra effort and skill in navigating the waters of a Swedish high school.

On the other hand, this cultural diversity is one of the selling points of the organization and the higher organizational policy, to always have mother-tongue teachers, is an unconditional requirement for all language teaching, at our schools. This, clearly, is strength and needs to be more highly profiled, externally. This is a profile-able point that the team can very well emphasize, in strengthening its own viability and highlighting our uniqueness.

Integration of all the EU nations has proven to be a huge challenge and one that is neither easy nor complete. Culture clashes, on the one hand, and cultural diversity, on the other hand, make the work of developing the team and its profile an interesting and exciting undertaking. The fact that, as an organization and a team, we face the same sort of challenges, as the world at large. We are authentically and inescapably, an integral part of the broader social

community that we belong to. If the EU can find ways of harmonizing and transcending national divisions, so can the ELP team and its colleagues, in forging a strong and viable international profile and new areas of school development

5.2 What is meant by development?

When talking about development from a school perspective it seems logical to look at what is actually meant by the word *development*. In reference to research done in the area of school development, Blossing (2003 p.16) gives an account of the many phases of *development* from a historical perspective. I can apply my action to methods originating in Organizational Development (OD), where Lewin's research generated strategies that formed the basis of action research. These strategies (OD) were applied to the school world in the 60's and 70's and became useful in the 80's in the work involving, what he calls the fourth phase, where increased knowledge of the inner life (workings) and culture, is examined and whereby, school-based development and questions around how, on the school level, one deals with complex changes and many simultaneous improvements. My own investigation of the teacher team has surprisingly shown me how complex the issues can be and that trying to address one single problem becomes a very challenging task, which impacts many organizational levels and individuals. Nonetheless, working for improvement is rewarding and can help to identify other areas that need to be investigated and this can serve to bring forth new and relevant research in other related fields. My action has certainly brought my colleagues to the table and forced us to examine ourselves, our praxis, our potential and productivity and our movement. We have come a little deeper in analyzing and understanding how far we have come and how much farther we have to go. Based on the depth and breath of our discussions and the insight that is evident in the interview responses, I think I can safely say that this action has had an impact. Perhaps, development is not taking a straight and clear path towards our goal but we certainly have a much-improved environment for cooperation, team building and collaboration.

Development implies that there is development from a lower to a higher level, so the word itself, is not neutral. According to (Carlgren, Hörnqvist, 1999) school development is about changing something, within the school, for the better and in that way moving the organization forward. When, on the other hand, looking at development from a personal perspective, Hargreaves (1994, p.91) says that many researchers emphasize the importance of self-

development and self-awareness, as key concepts to professional development within teaching staff. So, I can agree that my own personal development has been a key factor in being able to carry out this action and win the confidence of my colleagues in pursuing that which we feel is important, based on our own experience and not relying on external expertise to research and solve our problems for us. In this way, I have seen and tried to eliminate the obstacles that stand in our way and prevent teachers, from developing strategies that are creative and directly applicable to our local situation. This empowerment is essential if we are to continue to move ahead with the on-gong, cyclical work of school development and personal development, which go hand in hand. I see many of my colleagues taking more initiative in meetings and developing new alliances, both externally and internally, across the board. This is very encouraging and is evidence that others are getting inspired and want to find new ways to tell their stories and alter their experience. As others have observed me and been a sounding board for my enquiries and responded to my requests for help in this project, I have seen the growth and insight that these colleagues have gained. Perhaps, there will others who will want to emulate me and take on an action project, themselves.

5.4 Continuing to strengthen and develop the team from the administrative perspective

From the administrative perspective, I would dare say that the team is in a new phase of development and restructuring. The core of the team remains intact and can be limited to that size or it can be expanded, although previous attempts to revitalize the team, by adding or subtracting other members, have not been successful, to date. The key to finding a stable constellation of members depends on the level of authentic inter-dependence of the subjects that are to/can be integrated into the team. If those subjects (teachers) do not have a real and justifiable reason to incorporate or collaborate with the foreign languages, then there will not be a successful expanding of the ELP team. This is the major task that faces the administration in developing the team and bringing it to a more effective organizational level.

According to Blossing (2004, p 7) research shows that the free space for schools and municipalities is large, when it comes to development work areas. A large free space is not the same as being able to do whatever one wants. Demands on schools, over time, have not

decreased but rather increased. On the other hand, when it comes to organizing and forming the work-social aspects that will shape the teaching of the 21st century, the free space is large.

The fact that the free space is important does not mean that it is easy to occupy. On the contrary, it is a very difficult undertaking because it is so complex. It involves being vigilant and working on many levels at the same time, an individual level, as well as, an organizational level. But it is also the complexity in development and improvement work that makes it so interesting and fun. In the complexity of it, there are not only difficulties but also many opportunities, where there is a job for each and every one of us. Blossing (2003, p 8).

Blossing maintains that there are no easy models for school improvement work. To occupy the free space means to follow up organizational models and administrative routines, through dialog, by making clear and concrete connections between these and the practical pedagogical work of teaching. The ultimate responsibility of this lies with the principal.

The administration can choose any number of ways to develop the team and the free space exists as described above. Finding the specific needs of the team requires on-going dialog and exploration together with the members, of what measures can and should be taken to reach a favourable strategy that will give the team members the tools to build a strong entity. Perhaps this dialog can result in providing continuing education, in the form of courses, seminars, study visits, workshops, external coaching, stipends for providing other types of expertise in the field of team building and team development. The important thing is to identify the needs and desires of the team and design a strategy for implementation. Asking the right questions and probing the problems is critical to finding solutions that are appropriate and long lasting.

The very fact that my colleague and I are participating in this Master's program is proof that the administration is interested in fostering school, as well as, team development. Certainly, we have been given administrative support and encouragement to learn and raise our level of professionalism, which benefits both the organization and my colleagues and I. I am eternally grateful for having been given the opportunity to be a part of this program and to have the chance to broaden my horizons and deepen my understanding of the academic world of which I have been a part but have not fully participated in, to the extent, which I can now. I am still a novice action researcher and have a lot to learn but I have become a more critical thinker than I was before and hope to develop my skills in this area even more.

5.5 Studying your own school

During the course of this action, I have found some answers to the problem of strengthening the profile of the team as a catalyst for development, by applying a design and methods prescribed by advocates of action research and action learning. Through the project, I have assumed the role of research practitioner and submerged myself in many facets of research in my own school and my own teacher team. This has been a very meaningful experience and one that I hope will be repeated in one way or another by myself or by colleagues, who may also be inspired to do action research in order to resolve a problem, improve praxis or stimulate development. Although I designed the action, based on tested models and theories, nearly two years ago, I did not foresee the out-come. I was green and not able to really anticipate the responses I got or understand the scope of responsibility in initiating an action.

Jean Mc Niff (2002, p. 5) talks about *the certainty of the value of uncertainty* as a means of explaining the potential of action research as a way of learning about one's practice, and as a power for personal and social renewal.

By reflecting on the action itself, I have been able to gain deeper understanding of my role within the team and am better able to see that, what I have done, has been in some respects positive and other respects less positive. What was from the beginning, an extremely daunting project, gradually developed into a rather exciting undertaking, even if I knew that studying my own colleagues and examining their praxis and professionalism, as well as, my own, was rather risky business. Anderson, Herr, Nihlen (1994, p.26) maintain that, practitioners must make their peace with how much of a challenger of the status quo they wish to be. Some are more skillful and in stronger positions to take stands on issues than others. However, if practitioner research is not done with a critical spirit, it runs the risk of legitimating what may be, from the perspective of equity considerations, unacceptable social arrangements.

5.6 Distance and closeness

Now, I would like to touch upon some ideas of Pål Repstad (1999 p.10), concerning deep investigation, closeness and flexibility in qualitative research. Repstad talks about concrete qualitative methods, such as: observation; informant and respondent; and source analysis. It is

often said that qualitative research goes deep but not broad. In the tradition of qualitative research the emphasis is on the tight and close relationship between the researcher and the environment or the individuals being studied. In being so close to my field of study, I have also encountered difficulties when it comes to walking the fine line of risking a friendship or a good co-worker relationship. That is often what makes doing research so close to home, very intimidating and scary. There is more at stake than just not getting the finding you want.

He says, that an important ideal situation in qualitative method is to, as far as possible, have a close and direct relationship, to that which is being studied. Practical circumstances can often limit both closeness and duration of a project. But when it comes to a shorter and more practical oriented analysis of an organization, it can be said, that the ideal situation regarding closeness and long-standing contact in the qualitative research tradition cannot always be achieved in reality.

Repstad also talks about flexibility as a characteristic of qualitative method. In a quantitative questionnaire investigation, it is often seen as highly inappropriate to change the established questions when half of the selection group has been queried, whereas in a qualitative study this is not seen as a problem to alter the stimuli. There is also flexibility within the framework of the interview, as a certain answer to a certain question can lead to a follow-up question. I took the freedom to apply this flexibility principle to my own action, where democratic dialogue or round table discussion requires the constant application of flexibility, as the process is a fluid and informal interaction between team members that cannot and should not be restricted to fixed and rigid patterns of intercourse. There had to be room for follow-up questions, as well, and allowing the discussion to take its own natural investigative course.

When it comes to researching on one's home ground (own territory), Repstad (1999 p.27) sees certain problems arising, as more and more students, especially in higher education, want to connect their research to a work place, from where they already have experience. Many course books in methodology emphasize the problem with a researcher choosing a field where she/he knows the parties involved or has professional knowledge about the organization, which is to be investigated. When one observes friends, acquaintances or colleagues one has a tendency to choose sides. Moreover, one loses the academic distance and personal interests are brought in to the field of research. I can say from experience that it was difficult, at times, to maintain neutrality in the discussions and be a participant at the same time as an observer.

Among social anthropologists this is known as “going native”, in other words being one among the local population. When one knows some of the parties involved, there is a risk of self-censorship to avoid being at loggerheads with friends, whom one will meet after the research is finished. To maintain distance and impartiality is always a problem in qualitative investigations, but it really is put to the test if one has a personal relationship to someone in the environment one is studying.

Lastly, on the subject of closeness and distance, he says that one cannot underestimate the source of motivation and tolerance that can be found in that the researcher is affected as an individual by the phenomenon he or she finds in the environment being studied. This can, of course, result in a party report rather than a critical research report, but this is a problem that many social researchers are faced with. In addition, it can be an advantage to have previous knowledge about the environment if it means that one can better understand what is happening and can avoid drawing incorrect conclusions. On the other hand, having familiarity with the environment and how it all functions means that one takes more for granted than a researcher actually should do. I found many times that I had to remind myself to remain as objective as possible and that was not always easy.

To summarize this section, I have drawn on a number of experts in the field of action research in attempting to frame the nature and intent of my action. Gunnar Berg has been a tremendous source of inspiration and his theories on school culture and understanding the concept of inner and outer boundaries and discovering the free space that can be found in between these two, has been of central importance. Both Hargreaves and Blossing’s theories concerning the role of the teacher team in school development have given me a greater understanding of the complexities of team building, teacher professionalism and cooperation in the Post Modern Age. The concepts of closeness and distance that Pål Repstad outlines in his research have also been invaluable to me when placing myself in the center of my own team to explore how we can be influential in developing the new school curriculum. Literature that I have found on the subject of “democratic dialog”, as outlined in Tiller and based on research by Philips and Huzzard, points to the most fundamental rights and responsibilities that we all have as individuals, citizens, teaching professionals and good practitioner researchers.

One thing that was particularly gratifying was having the opportunity to interview the team members one year after the action. To get some distance to the project and see the results through a different lens was very interesting and to hear their frank views on the developments within the team, was quite refreshing. I am no longer a member of the team and therefore, have very little insight into what has been happening during this time. To get an assessment of the action, from the team members and to find out what each members recalls as the key features of the action, was very enlightening and has given me an opportunity to analyze and probe from a number of theoretical assumptions. Stensmo (2002, p.22) talks about the relationship of theory to practice, from two perspectives: *inductive and deductive*. The inductive method, where practical finding can be formulated into theory and thus, practical experience can provide theoretical meaning, is closest to what I have found in searching for answers to my problem.

As I outlined earlier, I will attempt to test the quality of the project by employing the five criteria for validity that are presented by Anderson, Herr, Nihlen (1994, p.30). When considering *democratic validity* or the extent to which the research is done in collaboration with all the parties, who have a stake in the problem under investigation, then I can say that this criteria, which is also referred to as *relevancy, applicability or local validity* has been fulfilled. I have included all those directly involved in the team and the principal.

Another test of the validity of action research, according to Cunningham (1993) is the extent to which actions occur that lead to a resolution of the problem under study. Here, the notion of validity as successfully completing an action research spiral of problem solving seems to make sense. This is referred to as *outcome validity* and it begs the question: successful for whom? My action has served to shed light on problems that existed within the team and attempted to resolve the issue of strengthening the teams profile as a way of moving the team forward, although new questions and new problems surfaced at the outset of the action forcing still other questions to be formulated and new problems to be solved. Clearly, there was resolution, although the outcome perhaps was not the one I had anticipated but it was the one that it was supposed to be, obviously. The team was eventually restructured, as a long-term result of the discussions and the role of team leader was eliminated. There was no way of avoiding the inevitable course of action that unfolded, because the truth is, it needed unfolding.

Process validity is described by Watkins (1991) as the “*dependability*” and the “*competency*” of the study. It answers the question, “To what extent are we able to determine the adequacy of the process and are problems solved in a manner that permits ongoing learning of the individual or system?” Outcome validity is dependent on process validity and if the former is flawed or superficial, the outcome will reflect it. I have used a variety of methods to gather data, namely: round-table discussions, observations and interviews, which provide for the application of triangulation to ensure more than one kind of data source. By including the principal and all the members of the team, I have guaranteed that the process is a valid and truthful narrative, as well. The potential for ongoing learning is evident by the responses to the interviews from my team members and certainly I, personally, will continue to deepen my knowledge of teacher team development and how action research and action learning can be useful methods of testing new problems.

“The degree to which the research process reorients, focuses and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it” is how Lather (1986, p 272) characterizes **catalytic validity**. In the case of practitioner research, not only the participants, but also the researchers themselves must be open to reorienting their view of reality, as well as, their view of their practitioner role. All involved in the research should deepen their understanding of the social reality under study and should be moved to some action to change it. Insofar as, the content and focus of the round-table discussions shifted from being a discussion about pedagogical issues of curriculum realignment and building a stronger team profile as a means of influencing school development to the organizational/structural problems existing within the team at that point in time. The reality of the situation dictated a reorientation of the problem and engaged the team in critical dialog to solve the immediate and over-shadowing issue of team stability and structure, which became the priority problem. So yes, I think I can say this criteria has certainly been fulfilled.

Last but not least, **dialogic validity** deals with the “goodness” of research through peer review monitoring. There are several opinions on how peer review should be done but according to (Martin, 1987), he suggests that practitioner researchers participate in critical and reflective dialogue with other practitioner researchers or work with a critical friend who is familiar with the setting and can serve as a devil’s advocate for alternative explanations of research data. When the dialogic nature of practitioner inquiry is stressed, studies can achieve what Myers (1985, p.5) calls “goodness-of-fit” with the intuitions of the teacher community, both in its

definition of problems and in its findings”. In this regard, I was lucky to have a colleague that was willing to engage in critical and constructive dialogue throughout the process, who provided me with another point of view and insights that I would have missed. Her critical and analytical assessment and input is invaluable and certainly broadened and deepened my ability to analyze the status of the situation and helped me to make a more objective assessment of what really took place and why. Another dimension of peer review can also be seen in the light of having a mentor in this Master’s program, which has also guided my inquiry method and helped me by providing constructive and encouraging criticism that has enabled my research project to stay on a focused methodical path of inquiry. I have also engaged external mentor from my Master’s reflection group and her keen and skillful input has guided me well.

In summing up, I feel that I can safely say that I have been able to show the validity of the project. Whether or not my action will inspire others in my school environment to carry out practitioner research in the field: of team building, team/school development, school culture analysis, personal development or other related and relevant areas, remains to be seen. But now, after my colleague at Naturhumanistiska Gymnasium and I have conducted two very different action research projects, perhaps others will be inspired and follow in our footsteps. I, personally, would like to continue working with other aspects of school development that my colleagues and I see as important and relevant to making our work place, as (McNiff, p.141) expresses - a place where we can contribute to the development of a good social order through education.

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7 Appendix

Appendix 1

ELP discussions – Prioritised school development areas: Language and Internationalisation

During the next three months, we will have the opportunity to meet three times. These meetings will focus on the new areas of school development and the role that the ELP team can play. The administration will also be interviewed about these future plans and asked to outline the role they see for team's development.

1 December 2006

I will give a brief outline of what Action Research is and how this action can be instrumental in advancing school development. I am interested in getting your opinions on how we can most effectively work towards strengthening our team, its image and position by defining ourselves in terms of these prioritised school goals. Then, with the help of questions, we will have an open and critical discussion, around the central question:

In what ways is the ELP team unique and how can this best be utilized to advance the goals of “Internationalisation and making Language the most important focus of the school”?

15 January 2007

Interview with the school principal to find out what the intent and goals of the school are, in regard to how the administration see the role of the ELP team in this work. This will be in the form of an interview and discussion.

26 January 2007

Presentation of the results and summary of the meetings, with an analysis of the findings. A further discussion of what needs to be done, what can be done and what will be done to advance the goals of internationalisation and making language the central focus of the of the school's profile.

Appendix 2

Questions for discussion within the ELP team – phase I

Vad är unikt för vårt team?	What is unique about our team?
Vad kan man se för positiva saker med att vi är olika?	What are the positive things about us having different nationalities?
Kan vi hitta arbetsformer som gynnar oss/skolan?	Can we find methods of working that will benefit the team? The school?
Vilka? Hur ser de ut?	What are they? What do they look like?
Hur vill vi att samarbete skall vara om ett år?	How do we want our cooperation /collaboration to be, in one year?
Vilken struktur vill vi ha om ett år?	What kind of team structure do we want to have, in one year?
Hur vill ledningen att vi skall ser ut om ett år?	What does the administration want us to look like, in one year?

Additional questions - phase I

Ser vi oss själva som ett team, varför?	Do we see ourselves as a team, why?
Vilket syfte har vårt team?	What is the purpose of our team?
Varför är vi ett team?	Why are we a team?
Vill vi vara ett team, varför?	Do we want to be a team, why?
Vad är det som kännetecknar oss som ett team?	What defines us as a team?
När ses vi utåt som ett team? Var? Av vem?	When are we seen as a team? Where, by whom?
Vad vill vi åstadkomma som ett team?	What do we want to do as a team?
Vad är det som förenar/delar oss?	What unites/divides us as a team?
Vad vill ledningen att vi skall åstadkomma?	What does the administration want the team to do?
Hur vill ledningen att vi skall fungerar?	How does the administration want us to operate?
Hur kan vi bli (bättre) som ett team?	How can we be a (better) team?

Appendix 3

Action Research

Forskning kännetecknas av:

Systematiskt observation

Sökande efter ny kunskap

Söka (rätta) frågor istället för (rätta) svar

Sannings sökande

These are two of the more famous descriptions of action research.

Description 1

Action research is a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as, their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out.

Kemmis and Mc Taggart, 1988.

Description 2

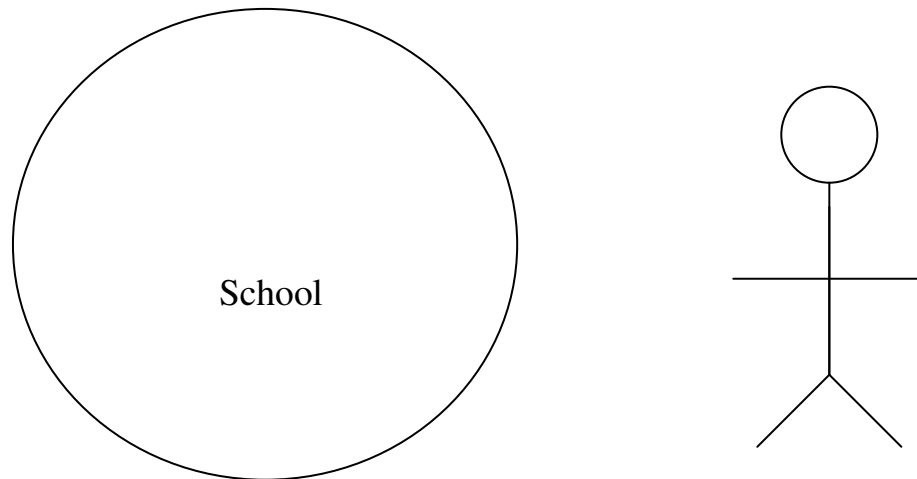
If yours is a situation in which: people reflect and improve (or develop) their own work and their own situations by tightly interlinking their reflection and action and also making their experience public not only to other participants but also to other persons interested in and concerned about the work and the situations and if yours is a situation in which there is increasingly participation (in problem-solving and in answering questions) in decision-making, power-sharing and the relative suspension of hierarchical ways of working towards industrial democracy, collaboration among members of the group as a “critical community”, self-reflection, self-evaluation and self-management by autonomous and responsible persons and groups learning progressively (and publicly) by doing and by making mistakes in a “self-reflective spiral” of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, re-planning, etc., which supports the idea of the (self-) reflective practitioner, then yours is a situation in which action research is occurring!

Zuber-Skerrit, 1992

Appendix 4

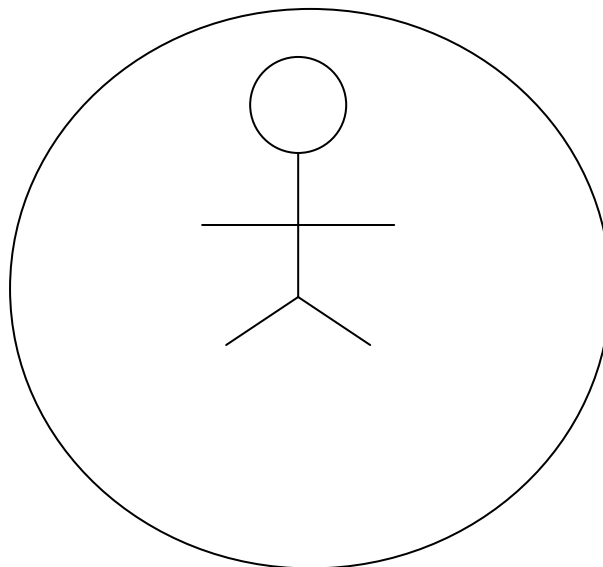
Action Research

Traditional research



Shows the researcher is placed outside the field of research, as an observing researcher.

Action research



Shows the researcher is placed inside the field of research, as a participating researcher.

Appendix 5

Intervjufrågor: Hur kan ELP lärarlaget vara en katalysator i utveckling?

Syfte med intervjuer: att undersöka hur lärarlaget kan vara en katalysator i utveckling.

För att friska upp minnet vill jag nämna några frågor vi diskuterade, till exempel: Ser vi oss själva som ett arbetslag? Hur kan vi ha en tydligare internationell profil? Hur vill vi jobba som arbetslag? Vilka hinder finns det för att jobba som ett arbetslag? Vill vi vara ett arbetslag? Etc.

1. Vad kommer du ihåg av diskussionerna kring ELP och anpassning till de nya spåren (som skulle komma)? Kortfattat.

2. Vilka sätt tycker du är effektiv för att påverka utveckling? T.ex.:

- diskussion inom lärarlagen
- diskussion mellan lärarlagen
- diskussion med ledningen
- skriva förslag om förbättringsarbete
- skriva protokoll/annat dokumentation kontinuerligt som lämnas till ledningen
- annat förslag.....

3. Vilken/a förändring (ar) har skett sedan våra diskussioner kring situationen i ELP laget för ett år sedan? T.ex. har den blivit:

- mer sammansvetsade (inåt) Hur?
- mindre sammansvetsade (inåt)
- starkare eller svagare (utåt) Hur?
- annat svar

4. Hur har ELP laget kommit närmare sitt mål med att ha en tydligare profil?

5. Hur fungerar arbetslaget idag? Förklara.

mer effektiv

mindre effektiv

ungefär samma som för ett år sedan

6. Vilka exempel på skolutveckling vid vår skola känner du till?

7. Vilka exempel på skolutveckling i vårt arbetslag känner du till?

8. Vilka exempel på skolutveckling har du varit med på?

9. Vad kännetecknar dessa exempel?

10. Vad kännetecknar arbete med god skolutveckling?

11. Hur tror du skolutveckling sker bäst?

- hos den enskilde
- i arbetslaget
- på hela skolan

12. Vem ska ha ansvaret för att driva skolutveckling?

13. När ett arbetslag ska driva skolutveckling, vad är det som ska drivas och hur ska det drivas?

14. Är det viktigt att arbetslaget har ansvar för skolutveckling? Varför?