



## Flexible Scheduling: Implementing an Innovation

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*Teachers, school library media specialists (SLMSs), and principals in six elementary schools were interviewed to explore the ways in which schools have successfully implemented flexible scheduling in their libraries. Overall findings and conclusions of the study are linked with Rogers' diffusion of innovation theory and compared with Shannon's 1996 study of flexible scheduling implementation in two Library Power schools. The voices of the principals, teachers, and SLMSs are heard. Patterns and themes are discussed in terms of assertions that can be made about commonalities among the approaches taken by the six schools. The individual schools' stories are provided in the appendix, "Stories of Successful Implementation of Flexible Scheduling," demonstrating what worked in each of the different situations. While generalization is not appropriate with a qualitative study such as this, it is important to consider what the conclusions might mean in other situations. Flexible scheduling was found to merely be a tool that facilitated curriculum-related programmatic features in these schools. Implementation and continuation required education and vigilance to ensure that everyone involved understood the potential and took advantage of the possibilities.*

The term "flexible scheduling," as it pertains to school library media centers, entered the vocabulary of school library media specialists (SLMSs) in the late '80s and early '90s. It had various interpretations then, as it does today. "Flexible scheduling" and "flexible access" have sometimes been interchangeably used. The terms have both been used to mean providing open access to the library media center throughout the day, rather than only during a scheduled "library time." The terms have also been used to mean eliminating a rigid schedule of regular library times for each class, allowing teachers to schedule their classes into the library as needed for appropriate lengths of time to suit the learning activity that was planned. For the purpose of this study, flexible scheduling was broadly considered: a scheduling arrangement that allows for variation in library use, rather than having each class scheduled into the library for a regular, fixed period. This definition does not include any programmatic features or describe how flexibility occurs.

In secondary schools, the school library and its resources are typically considered integral to the curriculum of the school. Students and classes tend to visit libraries in secondary schools on a point-of-need basis, when learning tasks dictate access to information, and the library itself is viewed as an extension of the classroom. The question of whether scheduling should be flexible or fixed tends to arise less frequently at the secondary level, especially in high schools. At the elementary school level, however, the school library is frequently viewed in a more isolated manner--a place that houses books and materials that must be borrowed and used according to a schedule. Why this view exists is beyond the scope of this research, but the existence of rigid or fixed schedules in school libraries militates against the use of the library when needed for learning, whether on a collaboratively planned basis or in recognition of the "teachable moment."

Many SLMSs recognize the educational value of providing access to information "just in time," when learners need to investigate further, rather than "just in case," when learners are provided with lessons presumed to have a future value. SLMSs struggle with belief systems that do not realize the role of SLMSs in integrating information literacy into curriculum areas. The long established routines of weekly visits to the library for a story, a lesson, or a borrowing session are difficult to break away from, with the recognition of other possible formats not necessarily understood or valued. SLMSs deplore the lack of time and opportunity to provide appropriate support for learning at the point of need because the day is occupied with teaching "library lessons" in isolation to provide planning time for teachers. How were those who work in schools with flexible-scheduled libraries able to implement this practice?

The current study, funded in part by the AASL/Highsmith Research Grant and the IASL Takeshi Murofishi Research Award, investigated how educators in six elementary schools were able to successfully implement flexible scheduling. It explored the various ways implementation occurred, the factors that emerged as relevant in each situation, and the attitudes held by those responsible for implementation.

## **Review of literature**

The conviction that flexible scheduling is a sound educational practice stems from the understanding gained through educational research into effective learning. Applications of brain research to the field of educational practice strongly suggest that because the brain learns by recognizing or finding patterns, it is important for learning opportunities to allow the learner to fit the new ideas into already existing knowledge (Caine and Caine 1994). Constructivism as a learning theory contends that individuals construct their own understanding, linking new knowledge and experiences with prior knowledge to expand previously developed mental models. Studies by numerous researchers on learning language, reading, spelling, and writing skills demonstrate that learning these skills in context is more effective than learning in isolation (Weaver 1996). Beeson's (1981) research of intellectual skills in isolation or in context showed that more meaningful learning occurred when the skills were taught in an anchoring context. Most teachers are aware from experience that a *teachable moment* is called that because the moment does

not last--the ability to capitalize on that moment at the point of need extends learning opportunities to take advantage of prior knowledge, context, and connecting patterns.

Inquiry-based instruction is a student-centered teaching strategy that supports these ideas. Students learn by asking and then investigating questions important to them. They first identify what they already know, analyze what they need to know, determine how to find out, and then evaluate their learning after investigating their questions (Kuhlthau 2003). Students take responsibility for their own learning to a greater extent than in a transmission style of learning experience. Inquiry learning is meaningful. Barronik's (2003) study of senior-level high school English students investigated what meaningful learning meant to them. Together these students generated a definition of a meaningful learning experience: "Meaningful assignments are open-ended, thereby allowing for choice, personal interest, and the expression of personal opinions, while encouraging thought and decision making about the world and yourself" (45). Students then participated in a project based on that definition. They "began to take ownership of their learning and expressed excitement about learning something new, about teaching themselves, about 'discovering things in the library, discovering books and stuff that we never had a chance to discover before'" (49). While this experience occurred with older students, rather than at an elementary school level, the concepts presented provide a window on effective learning and could be applied with younger age groups.

Stripling (2003) points out that "inquiry is not a collection of process skills and strategies; it is a relationship between thinking skills and content. Learners are, therefore, engaged in scientific inquiry, historical inquiry, social inquiry, literary inquiry, aesthetic inquiry, and other types of inquiry" (6). If students are conducting all these kinds of inquiry throughout their day, it can be assumed that at any level, students learning through inquiry need ready access to information--waiting a week until the class's regularly scheduled library period is inappropriate and counterproductive.

## **Flexible scheduling**

Inquiry learning cannot happen in a vacuum. Access to information is essential, and the school library media center is a logical source for information, access to information, and guidance. Elementary SLMSs who see the media center as an extension of the classroom have recognized the worth of providing access to library materials when needed. The traditional model provided *library time* on a fixed basis, often weekly, and in this model teachers often saw the library as a drop-off spot, where children can be sent to be read to or to be taught library skills while the teacher spends his or her time on something of greater value--curriculum planning. The potential of the SLMS and the media center is not realized when teachers and administrators view them merely as a solution to the problem of providing planning time to teachers. As the drive to promote inquiry learning increases, SLMSs advocate for recognition of their role in effecting this type of learning. *Information Power* provides learning and teaching principles in chapter 4, one of which states "The library media program fosters individual and collaborative inquiry" (AASL and AECT 1998, 58, 69). Goals to support this principle lead SLMSs to provide intellectual access, model appropriate inquiry behavior, collaborate with teachers,

promote the use of information and technology, and use information literacy standards to guide student learning (69-70). Flexible scheduling in school library media centers, an innovation that facilitates inquiry learning, has met with varying degrees of success. This study of SLMSs, principals, and teachers in U.S. elementary schools provides a window of opportunity to explore the innovation.

This article considers the term "innovation" in the same sense as Rogers (2003), who defines an innovation as:

an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption. It matters little, so far as human behavior is concerned, whether or not an idea is "objectively" new as measured by the lapse of time since its first use or discovery. The perceived newness of the idea for the individual determines his or her reaction to it. If an idea seems new to an individual, it is an innovation.(12)

Flexible scheduling is not conceptually new, although it is a new and untested idea in many schools. Shannon (1996) describes the history and development of the concept through various renditions of AASL standards, from the 1950s to the 1990s. Donham van Deusen and Tallman (1994) described three types of scheduling that were apparent in schools responding to their survey on flexible scheduling: fixed, mixed, and flexible. They defined fixed scheduling as a situation in which "a group is scheduled to come to the library media center for instruction or use of resources on a regular basis (often weekly), for a set length of time, frequently for the school year" (18). The flexible schedule was one in which "the library media specialist and the teacher plan together for instruction or use of resources based on student learning needs in each curriculum unit and schedule on that basis. The schedule is arranged on an ad hoc basis and varies constantly" (18). They found that a substantial number of schools actually had a mixed schedule, one that "could have been classified as flexible, because these participants worked with some teachers to schedule classes on a flexible basis and, therefore, might have the potential for more curriculum consultation with them; however, these SLMSs also met with some classes on a fixed-schedule basis, thus reducing their opportunity to meet with teachers" (19).

The *NCES Report on the Status of Library Media Centers in Public and Private Schools in the United States: 1999-2000* (U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics 2004) defines library scheduling this way:

Fixed scheduling consists of regularly scheduled class visits, usually on a weekly visit. Flexible scheduling allows teachers to bring their classes to the library media center when there is a need for library resources. Other school libraries adopt a combination approach to scheduling in which some classes or grades follow a fixed schedule and others visit the library whenever the need arises.(37)

The number of schools having flexibly scheduled school library media center programs is limited and the number of those moving to flexible scheduling has increased only slightly in recent years. A national survey conducted in 1993-94 by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) showed that 17 percent of public and 15 percent of private elementary school libraries in the sample had flexible schedules, 27 percent of public and 23 percent of private elementary school libraries had partially flexible schedules, and 57 percent of public and 62 percent of private elementary school libraries had fixed schedules (U.S. Department of Education 1998). By 1999-2000, these statistics had increased minimally to 21.6 percent of public and 28.4 percent of private elementary school libraries having flexible schedules, 27.5 percent public and 24.4 percent private elementary school libraries having mixed schedules, and 50.9 percent of public and 50.8 percent of private elementary school libraries still using fixed schedules (U.S. Department of Education 2004).

The Donham van Deusen and Tallman research (1994) investigated factors affecting the way in which SLMSs were involved in curriculum-related activities in school libraries using fixed, flexible, or mixed scheduling. They found that more collaborative planning and teaching existed in schools with flexible- or mixed-scheduled libraries, particularly where principals expected team planning and librarians were full-time and did not cover teacher planning time.

In 1998 Haycock reported on a study of a small sample of Canadian school libraries which confirmed Donham van Deusen and Tallman's findings. He discovered that more than three times as many curriculum units were carried out by teacher-librarians and more than twice as much collaborative planning occurred in schools with mixed or flexibly scheduled libraries than in schools with fixed schedules. One must be careful, though, not to attribute causality to the scheduling plan, as no indication of the reason for the relationship was discovered in either Haycock's or Donham van Deusen and Tallman's work. Haycock (1998) suggested that flexible scheduling might be "more indicative of leadership practices and collaborative activities than having a causal relationship with consultative tasks" (23). Perhaps flexible scheduling happens as a result of collaboration, not the other way around. In a survey by McCracken (2001), however, elementary SLMSs identified the lack of a flexible schedule as the fourth most common barrier to being able to implement the roles advocated by *Information Power* (AASL and AECT 1998).

Because a relationship between flexible scheduling and collaborative planning and teaching has been identified, these findings may provide support for those who wish to implement flexible scheduling, believing that it will provide a greater opportunity for collaborative planning and effective support of inquiry learning. Little is known, however, about how to effectively implement flexible scheduling. Donham van Deusen (1995) suggested the following conditions are necessary for successful implementation:

- An information skills curriculum matched with the content area curriculum
- Flexible access to the library media center
- Team planning

- Principal expectations for collaboration with teachers
- A commitment to resource-based learning (17-18)

Two other factors that might enhance flexible scheduling implementation, but that were not studied in any depth by Donham van Deusen (1995) were adequate support staff and an assessment plan for the school library media center (18). Schools in nineteen communities across the United States participated in the Library Power project, funded by the DeWitt-Wallace Reader's Digest Fund and designed to improve learning and teaching in schools through improvement of school libraries and school library programs (Wheelock 1999). The evaluation of the project, which required flexible scheduling in school library media centers, showed higher levels of support staff in schools with completely flexible schedules. This higher level was "necessary for a library to be responsive to multiple and spontaneous demands for service" (Zweizig 1999, 20).

The evaluation of the Library Power program used case studies, questionnaires, and extensive documentation of practice. It showed that flexible scheduling was not necessarily embraced or understood by teachers. "For many . . . teachers, experience with the flexible schedule was required for them to have some sense of the benefits it could bring their teaching" (Zweizig 1999, 20). The evaluators noted, though, that "the majority of teachers report that their students are using the library more (65 percent), are using it more on their own initiative (60 percent), and have a more positive attitude toward using the library (72 percent)" (Wheelock 1999, 11). The assumption is that flexible scheduling supported that change, but again, the cause is likely to be multiple factors that were part of the Library Power project, not simply a scheduling change.

Shannon (1996) investigated in depth the development of flexible scheduling in two Library Power schools in Kentucky. After their first year of flexible scheduling, she identified challenges that had to be met by these schools in terms of communication, public relations, support, resources, professional development, school climate, and new roles. One school had moved to a fully flexible schedule and the second had partially implemented flexible scheduling by the end of the first year. Because of the Library Power studies something is known about implementation of flexible scheduling in situations where significant monies are provided to create positive educational change. Most schools, however, do not receive extra funding contingent on implementing flexible scheduling. Is implementation different in schools where no mandate related to funding exists? How and why does implementation of flexible scheduling occur? What makes this innovation acceptable to those involved?

## **Innovation and change**

Everett Rogers developed a diffusion of innovation model in the 1960s that explains variable rates of acceptance of technology innovation. His description of five characteristics of innovation (2003), however, do not apply solely to technological innovation and are of interest when considering what leads people to accept any innovation.

6. "*Relative advantage* is the degree to which an innovation is perceived as better than the idea it supersedes" (15). When applying this concept to introducing flexible scheduling, one must wonder to what extent flexible scheduling works better than fixed scheduling. What does "better" mean in this situation?
7. "*Compatibility* is the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being consistent with the existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters" (15). Do teachers and principals consider flexible scheduling compatible with other programs in the school? Does it promote the values and mission of the school and the educators?
8. "*Complexity* is the degree to which an innovation is perceived as difficult to understand and use" (16). If teachers find it difficult to use or for their students to use the library in a flexibly scheduled situation, they will be less likely to accept the innovation.
9. "*Trialability* is the degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis" (16). Can the new policy of flexible scheduling be accepted gradually or tried out on a limited basis?
10. "*Observability* is the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others" (16). Do the teachers and SLMSs share the positive outcomes of flexible scheduling with administrators and other teachers and beyond the school to others who might be curious?

The extent to which these characteristics enrich the understanding of implementation at the study sites will be explored along with other aspects of the implementation.

The change process is identified by three commonly accepted phases, described by Fullan (1991) as initiation, implementation, and continuation. Initiation is the period when "someone or some group, for whatever reasons, initiates or promotes a certain program or direction of change" (48). In the second phase, or implementation, the participants try to make the new program work. Continuation, often called institutionalization, is the stage at which the program has become the accepted way of doing things. Fullan notes that change is actually highly complex, and this breakdown is somewhat simplistic, but it does provide a vocabulary for considering the way in which innovations are accepted.

Change is a reality of public education. School reform has been under discussion for many years, with fundamental changes prescribed. Initiatives are constantly introduced, some programmatic, others organizational. Many of these initiatives are not institutionalized. Indeed, educators may become somewhat jaded after seeing initiatives come and go. Reasons for failure of an initiative can be many--some are based on the initiative itself and some on the environment or the manner in which it was introduced. Leadership is often a factor in effective implementation of a new initiative, and while leadership is often assumed to be administrative, this leadership might come from elsewhere. When flexible scheduling is introduced to a school, the leadership provided by both the principal and the SLMS can be a factor in the success or failure of the initiative. Fullan (2001) states that "good leaders foster leadership at other levels" (10). The Heller and Firestone (1994) study of eight schools found that, in contrast to evidence from previous research, no "heroes" emerged as leaders. Instead, leadership was shared by a

team. In schools where the SLMS is encouraged to lead, reforms related to effective information access and use are more likely to be possible. "Library media specialists, individually and collectively, need to seek leadership positions and to carve out positive and visible places for themselves in the reform effort" (Hartzell 2001).

## **Philosophical foundation of the inquiry**

This study takes the form of a constructivist inquiry, based on the same philosophical principles as constructivist learning theory. No one reality is assumed, no single right answer is expected. Instead multiple realities are constructed by individuals, "often under the influence of a variety of social and cultural factors that lead to shared construction" (Guba and Lincoln 1989, 13). A constructivist inquiry explores the possible meanings attached to a phenomenon within a particular context. A constructivist approach recognizes the importance of the subjective experience of the individual. The researcher attempts to understand and interpret the realities that are constructed by the individuals involved, seeking patterns that might emerge among the experiences and rich detail that can inform the practice of others. Those wishing to learn from constructivist research will in turn construct their own reality from what they read, interpreting findings in light of their own situations.

This research report is interpretive--interpreting triangulated data, not simply repeating what individual participants said. In research of this nature, the researcher becomes a *bricoleur*-- "a person who uses only the tools at hand to achieve a purpose" (*Macquarie Dictionary* 2001, 241)--or a quilt maker, piecing together the bits gathered from participants into a new interpretation (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 4). Qualitative research reporting is often characterized by "thick description" in which a detailed context is provided to enable readers to determine the relevance of a particular situation to their own (Geertz 1973). Rather than providing absolute answers, this kind of research allows the thoughtful reader to select relevant issues and ignore the irrelevant ones.

Because participants were interviewed in confidence, they remain unaware of specific details provided by other participants in their school and therefore may not recognize some of the interpretations. The final interview with the SLMSs was used to confirm some interpretations, but overall member checks of all participants were not used because no single individual could provide an overall verification.

## **Method**

In spite of the potential positive outcomes of flexible scheduling, many elementary SLMSs struggle with how to put it in place in their schools. Some school library media centers, however, do operate effectively on a flexible basis. The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which schools have successfully implemented flexible scheduling in their libraries. What are the factors that impact that success? The study is based on two assumptions, drawn from the literature and from experience: (1) flexible scheduling is desirable, and (2) the outcomes of flexible scheduling are worthwhile.

## **Selection of schools**

School library leaders--educators, district coordinators, and AASL leaders--were asked to identify elementary schools where flexible scheduling was in place and appeared to be effectively operating. SLMSs were also invited to nominate themselves as research participants if they believed that implementation had been successful in their schools. Several criteria were applied to selection: schools must not have received external funding that was dependent on flexible scheduling being in place (such as in Library Power schools [Zwiezig 1999]), flexible scheduling must have been in place for at least two years, and the current SLMS must have been the one who implemented flexible scheduling. SLMSs in the schools identified were contacted and asked to confirm the previous elements, that the principal would be willing to be interviewed, and that the SLMS expected that most teachers in the school were likely to agree that flexible scheduling was successfully operating in their schools. All teachers in the twenty one schools identified were surveyed to determine whether teachers did agree with the claim of success. Only schools that received at least 75 percent agreement were considered. A purposeful sample of five schools were chosen from this group to provide as wide a variety of school types as possible from different parts of the United States. A sixth school was selected in which to pilot the interviews. Because the pilot led to very minimal changes in the semistructured interviews, the data from the pilot have been incorporated into the findings.

The schools ranged in size, focus, socioeconomic area, and grades. Most were public schools but one was private. [Table 1](#) provides a breakdown of characteristics. Although a sample of six schools is small, extensive data were gathered from multiple sources, providing a wide range of experiences with which a broad spectrum of schools can identify. Generalization is not possible, but in constructivist inquiry generalization is not the goal. How well the findings transfers to other settings cannot be known by the constructivist researcher who sends the message, but the receiver of that message can examine the situation and the details, considering thoughtfully how well the situation relates to the receiver's own site and circumstances (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 297-98).

## **Data collection method**

Because the research explored lived experience, it was important to talk at some length to a variety of people involved. A semistructured interview method was chosen in order to provide somewhat comparable data across the sites being evaluated. Because the six selected schools were spread across the United States, extended telephone interviews with SLMSs, principals, and teachers were chosen as the best way to collect data. SLMSs were interviewed twice and principals and teachers were interviewed once.

## **Conduct of interviews**

SLMSs provided lists of teaching staff to the researcher, and from these lists three teachers were randomly selected, one from grades 1 to 3, one from grades 4 to 5, and a third from the entire pool of teachers. In four schools, all three teachers were interviewed.

In one school, two of the three were unable to schedule a suitable interview time; and in the pilot school, only one teacher was interviewed, providing a total of fourteen teachers. SLMSs were interviewed first. Principals and teachers were then interviewed and the data collected were analyzed before returning to SLMSs for the second and final interview. Although the study was not originally planned to be longitudinal, circumstances conspired to make it possible to consider changes over several years, which resulted in some useful extensions to the preliminary conclusions. The final SLMS interviews were conducted two and a half years after the original data were gathered. These final interviews led to additional assertions and served to confirm conclusions over time and extend depth of understanding.

## **Content of interviews**

A preliminary Delphi study of school library media district coordinators was conducted to discover issues worthy of exploration through the in-depth interviews. These experts had all been instrumental in promoting flexible scheduling within their school districts and were familiar with a wide range of circumstances. The Delphi study identified the following themes:

- Support for flexible scheduling
- Necessity and effect of preexisting factors
- Importance of teachers' and SLMSs' understandings of the concept and the advantages gained from those understandings
- Ongoing needs during implementation
- Barriers to implementation
- Importance of variables such as school size, clerical help, and teaching philosophies (McGregor 2002, 76)

These themes provided the framework for exploratory questions in the semistructured interviews of SLMSs, principals, and teachers.

## **Findings**

Findings will be discussed first as they relate to the three types of interviewees, providing the opportunity for each group's voice to be heard. Then similarities among the sites will be identified in the form of assertions that can be made through interpretation of the data, based on overall patterns and themes. Third, differences and variations will be discussed and compared to the Library Power schools in the Shannon study (1996). Finally, Rogers's diffusion of innovation model will be applied to the innovation of flexible scheduling in these schools.

### **The principals' voices**

Detailed findings related to principals were published in an early article (McGregor 2002). These findings were categorized into findings related to what principals said and what was said about the role principals play in implementing flexible scheduling. Briefly,

principals perceived flexible scheduling as a mechanism for providing "better collaboration between teachers and the librarian and for curriculum support" (78). They suggested that it allows for "the teachable moment." Principals' concerns were related to the logistics of equity--being able to provide for everyone and being sure that everyone was taking advantage of the library program even when not forced to do so. Principals also wisely recognized that it is difficult to attribute positive learning results solely to flexible scheduling, suggesting that they are more likely to be related to multiple factors, only one of which might be flexible scheduling. The principals did, however, believe that flexible scheduling benefits everyone, with this principal's words summing up:

*I think the media specialist is in a better position to impact on curriculum goals and to make sure that her efforts and the teachers' efforts are collaborative and correlated. I think for teachers, probably the advantages are making sure that the children are provided with opportunities and information that they might not have access to in the classroom. I think the children have the advantage of knowing that the media center is a working environment where INFORMATION POWER is felt throughout the day and is not restricted to just one set of activities or just to check out books. I guess I don't see any disadvantages.*

Principals saw their role in implementing flexible scheduling as supporters and partners. Without exception they credited their SLMSs for the effective implementation and ongoing positive outcomes. The principals had been indoctrinated by either the SLMS or the district coordinator initially, attending meetings where the idea was presented, visiting other schools to view the initiative, or reading articles about flexible scheduling. In some cases, they implemented alternatives to planning time previously provided by the SLMS, which lessened resistance shown by some teachers.

### **The teachers' voices**

The fourteen teachers, teaching from kindergarten to fifth grade, represented a range of experience with flexible scheduling, with some of them being new to their school and to flexible scheduling and others having had years of experience in either or both. In order to gain a sense of what flexible scheduling meant to teachers, they were asked to describe what type of flexible scheduling is in their schools. Teachers suggested flexible scheduling was a time when students can come and go freely from the classroom to the library, when teachers can schedule the library as needed, as an "extension of my classroom," to quote one of the teachers. Some emphasized the freedom to send students, while others saw it as the freedom to bring their classes to the library. Some suggested that with flexible scheduling, there was always someone available to help students (when sending individuals) or more people to help groups of students (when bringing classes). Some described scheduling time with the SLMS, not just time in the library. Clearly, these teachers understood and took advantage of the flexibility of the concept.

Almost all those interviewed demonstrated a very positive attitude towards flexible scheduling. A few based that attitude on the fact that they could also use a fixed time

within that flexible scheduling (termed *mixed scheduling* by Donham and Tallman [1994]), although one confessed to preferring a fixed schedule for reasons of consistency. Some were effusive in their praise while others made comparisons to previous experiences in other schools:

*I love the flexible schedule because it allows me to send the students as they need to get a book or as they need to do research and doesn't tie me to a certain time, and the students can read as much as they want to because they can go and get more books and don't have to wait until the next week to get a book.--fourth-grade teacher*

*It's a lot easier to be able to say, "Why don't you go check it out in the library? That's a great question." And feel comfortable that they can go to the library and be able to get the help and look it up without me trying to schedule a time, like, "OK, that's a great question, but we'll have to look it up next week when we go to the library."--third- and fourth-grade teacher.*

When asked to respond to the idea of teachers losing planning time previously covered by the SLMS, one teacher made a provocative comment:

*You need to look at it the other way to see that the students really benefit the most, it depends on who we're here to benefit, I guess--for the benefit of the teacher or the benefit of the students, being able to learn some real-life skills.--fourth-grade teacher*

The teachers described what they believed to be the effects of flexible scheduling on children:

*They're really using the library for what it's for, it gives the real-life type of skills, 'cause that's how libraries are in general, you go in and use it yourself whenever you want to and need to. It gives them reason to learn to use the library when they want to, and that's what libraries are for.--fourth-grade teacher*

*And I think it also encourages the children to use the library more. At other schools I've been at, the library just isn't on anyone's mind. But I think in ours the library is very central. Not only is it physically central in the building, but I think it's central in kids' minds.--first- and second-grade teacher*

*I said, "Go on! Some of you can go up and come back then in fifteen minutes," and they did. And the librarian said, "They were so excited!" But I don't think I would have been able to capitalize on their excitement if I had to say, "Just hold on to that idea for a few days, and then we'll talk about it."--first- and second-grade teacher*

*And with the flexible scheduling, I feel like the kids are actually utilizing the library for its true purpose, to have the information there, so they can gather it and learn more about a topic. And that's a definite benefit, that the kids have grown tremendously in their research abilities.--fourth-grade teacher who felt strongly, however, that there was not enough flexible time available in her school for students to exchange books*

## **The SLMSs' voices**

SLMSs noted that the principals' support was essential to the effective implementation. SLMSs believed that their principals' willingness to take risks was crucial to the success of the initiative. They identified the confidence their principals expressed in them and the willingness of principals to support change that would lead to improved service to teachers and students and student learning outcomes as important factors in the success.

SLMSs spent a lot of the interview time talking about the kinds of things they were doing with students and teachers, things that flexible scheduling facilitated. They described planning sessions, integrated units and research projects, spontaneous information searching, increased reading, and small group and individual activity. They portrayed busy, active libraries, with multiple activities going on at any one time, populated by students from several classes, teachers, and parents.

Some of the SLMSs stated that because of the way they have been able to work with classes on a collaborative, flexible basis, their role is changing to one where they teach teachers as much as they teach students. Some of this teaching is in relation to how best to teach within a flexible schedule:

*. . . in order for me to do the flexible scheduling and the collaboration and the integration, I have to teach them what it is and what does it look like? And what does it do for them? And what difference does it make? And why should they spend the time with me? And that's going to better their curriculum and how that's going to help their skills, and why you should stay in there and we'll work together instead of go and have a planning time.--an SLMS*

This SLMS also stated that the teachers were at different stages in their learning, meaning that collaboration with different teachers developed in different ways depending on the experience they had. Another described how she modeled teaching of research skills by teaching the students in a particular area of research with one class, then sharing the teaching the next year, and turning over much of the teaching the third year. Another one explained that as a school gets larger, it is virtually impossible to do all the information literacy and research teaching and that one spends more time working with the new teachers.

SLMSs provided advice to those hoping to implement flexible scheduling in their schools. This advice stemmed from their individual experiences and included:

- *Start with someone you deeply trust, who likes you, who is willing to try an experiment. Don't try the whole school.*
- *And the main thing you have to tell yourself--and not just for flexible scheduling--but I think that any time you're working with a large number of people and the different personalities of people, you just have to keep reminding yourself that you can't please all of the people all of the time.*
- *Go slowly to make sure the principal fully understands what the concept is, not to ram it down anybody's throat because it isn't going to work. Everybody has to be kind of cajoled into buying into it and having a little bit of ownership of it.*
- *I would think that a person who is thinking about doing this should really go and watch it somewhere and talk to the librarian and ask her about things like that [dealing with things changing all the time] and think about if they can handle that.*
- *I would say to study up, to become well-versed on it, what are its benefits, and to become convinced. You have to be so convinced that you live it, you breath it, you do it and you don't even know why anymore, but you still have to be able to voice it, so that you can go around and start selling everybody. If you're convinced about it, it's going to come out in everything you breathe and do. And if you come out as a confident person, then it's alright.*

## Discussion

Preliminary findings were presented at an IASL conference, before the final interviews with the SLMSs (McGregor 1999). Further data collection and analysis has confirmed the patterns identified and provided support for additional assertions. All the assertions are discussed below.

### **Assertion 1. In each case, a particular educational need drove the move to flexible scheduling**

Even when interview questions were directed specifically at the scheduling concept, discussions quickly moved away from the actual schedule to what was happening in the library because it had a flexible schedule. Clearly the importance of flexible scheduling was related to the programmatic features that were enabled by the flexibility. In four schools, the flexible schedule allowed better curriculum integration, in one school the key feature was support of literacy and multiple reading initiatives, and in the sixth school a combination of both meaningful curriculum support and a strong reading initiative were the factors driving implementation. No school was limited to one focus or the other, but in five out of six, the emphasis on one seemed to stand out more than the other. Flexible scheduling, then, was a tool that facilitated something else that was already happening or that someone wanted to make happen, rather than an end in itself. Flexible scheduling did not cause the programmatic feature, although the introduction or expansion of that feature and flexible scheduling might have concurrently occurred. This supports Haycock's (1998) suggestion that the existence of flexible scheduling may say more about leadership practices and collaborative ideas than it does about why consultation occurs. In all cases in the current study, flexible scheduling provided a means for consultation

between teachers and SLMSs. It did not make that consultation happen. The fact that flexible scheduling existed could be attributed to the leadership of various people in the schools and to the acceptance of the idea of collaboration by many stakeholders.

Acceptance of flexible scheduling might be easier in a school in which the educational initiative that drives it is already occurring. This was the case in at least one school in which project-based learning was already happening and another in which strong reading initiatives were in place. The existing culture of the school is likely to have an impact on acceptance and implementation.

### **Assertion 2. The principal's support was critical**

SLMSs invariably identified principals' support as a vital element in their success. The support was often the result of trust that principals held for their SLMSs and the education provided to them by district coordinators and SLMSs. Some principals visited other schools to view flexible scheduling in practice and others read articles or attended meetings where the concept was introduced. Most of them were unfamiliar with flexible scheduling prior to the suggestion by the SLMS, but when they understood the potential for educational value, they were easily convinced to try it. Support took the form of cheerleading, endorsing, mandating, enabling, and advocating.

### **Assertion 3. When the schools devised acceptable alternatives to providing teacher planning time, the stress of implementation was less**

All types of participants identified loss of teacher planning time, formerly provided by SLMSs, as an obstacle to teacher satisfaction in the beginning. Typically, some teacher planning time had been provided through the existence of a fixed schedule where teachers dropped their classes off in the library. In some cases, alternatives were created to provide the same amount of planning time in a different way. Where this happened, teachers were less reluctant to try the new initiative. Some principals realized at the beginning that the hurdle of planning time needed to be addressed before attempting to introduce flexible scheduling. They saw this problem as theirs to solve. Teachers who had been in the school when implementation occurred identified the planning time issue as a concern at the beginning, but teachers who arrived at the school after flexible scheduling was in place accepted the status quo as they found it. All interviewed teachers had adapted to the situation over time and were no longer concerned about the issue. Details of the different ways in which planning time was provided can be found in the [appendix](#).

### **Assertion 4. Personal qualities of the SLMS appeared to be very important to successful implementation**

In all cases, the principals praised their SLMSs highly and suggested many characteristics that made their efforts successful. The implication was that the following qualities applied to far more than implementing flexible scheduling, but that question was not asked. Flexibility, energy, a sharing and facilitating mindset, competence, persistence,

awareness of national trends and best practices, a sense of humor, enthusiasm, and an ability to deal with many different kinds of people were all important. The most commonly mentioned characteristic was flexibility. SLMSs portrayed themselves as accommodating, enthusiastic, energetic, organized, reliable, inquisitive, risk-taking, willing to experiment, not uncomfortable with change, hard-working, willing to compromise and adapt to meet teachers' needs. The situations they described often demonstrated these characteristics. Again, the characteristic that kept recurring in many of their answers and anecdotes was flexibility. Teachers also mentioned flexibility as an important characteristic of an SLMS who wishes to implement and successfully carry out flexible scheduling. When telling stories of their experiences in the library, they also described their SLMSs as being very accommodating and energetic.

### **Assertion 5. Certain teacher characteristics promote successful use of flexible scheduling**

Teachers, principals, and SLMSs were asked to describe the kind of teacher who can best use flexible scheduling to advantage. Because the participating schools were selected based upon the agreed-upon success of flexible scheduling, these people were actually describing most of the teachers in their schools, although the question was not phrased that way. The standard they set, then, is clearly reachable. According to these responses, those who best use flexible scheduling are good teachers: they are inquiry-based, they exercise good discipline, and they trust children and believe that they are curious and can learn to ask good questions. They are collegial: open to sharing, cooperative, willing to be involved and to share accountability, good team players and communicators. They are flexible themselves: willing to try new things, risk-takers, creative, open-minded, willing to learn, comfortable with lack of structure. They are good planners who appreciate literature and information, are assertive, are concerned with the big picture, and who do not give up easily. Of course, no one individual named all these characteristics, which means that teachers demonstrated varying combinations of these characteristics.

### **Assertion 6. Support staff plays a critical role in successful implementation**

It was no surprise that in most schools the existence of and work done by support staff enabled the implementation. Not all teachers were aware, though, of who was support staff and who was not, but made comments about "the librarians," even though there was only one SLMS in the school. These teachers were making the point that the number of adults working in the library made it possible for things to happen that otherwise would not. Interestingly, though, the one school that had no support staff managed to operate on a flexible schedule anyway, and the teachers were heavily involved with the SLMS in cooperative planning and teaching. This school did make extensive use of student volunteers and the SLMS suggested that a lot more could be done with more support staff. This school limited flexible and open access to specific times during the day, a factor that prompted some teacher concern when comparing to a fixed schedule that would give all classes a standard time for book exchange. See the [appendix](#) for further detail.

### **Assertion 7. Implementation can follow different paths and the approach depends on the situation**

There is no one right way to implement flexible scheduling. Each school was in a different situation when the idea was broached, and each school worked within their own circumstances to implement the initiative, but in all cases it was done to facilitate the programmatic elements mentioned in assertion 1. In some cases, the initiative was mandated by the district and in others it was suggested by the district coordinator or the SLMS. Where mandated or suggested by district administration, the purpose was to support a drive to increase resource-based learning and curriculum integration across the district. Teachers and principals received some professional development to develop skills at integration and discover the ways to best use the flexible scheduling model. In the cases where the idea was initiated by the SLMS, it was suggested as a way to improve learning in comparison to fixed scheduling situations observed by or dealt with in other schools or previous years. In all cases, the SLMS was convinced of the worth of the initiative, regardless of the source of the idea.

Some schools implemented flexible scheduling across the school at one time, and others brought it in gradually, starting with the older children. One principal recognized the idea of flexible scheduling as sound, but waited for the right moment before pushing for it. When a committee of teachers evaluated another school program and recommended change, this principal realized that the time was right to implement flexible scheduling and at the same time move the library to the room vacated by the other program, making concurrent multiple activities in the library possible. This principal maintained that had she not waited for the right moment, the initiative would have been less successful.

### **Assertion 8. Both learning and the library are more relevant to students because they know they need the information and the skills**

This assertion is based on perceptions of teachers, principals, and SLMSs, not on external achievement testing. Flexible scheduling (and the related curriculum innovations enabled through the flexibility) has made a difference to students. Students consider the library as an obvious source of information and use it naturally to find answers to their questions. SLMSs suggested that teachers were often surprised at how well students adapted to and made good use of the greater freedom afforded them by a flexibly scheduled library.

### **Assertion 9. SLMSs had a more integrated view of the library program and the outcomes of flexible scheduling than did other participants**

Although integration of curriculum was a goal to some extent in all these schools, SLMSs had a more integrated view than did the other participants. In talking about flexible scheduling, SLMSs were likely to extend the conversation into the realm of the curriculum initiative, voluntarily bringing up the effects of resource-based learning or the results of unlimited access to an expanded collection of reading materials. Teachers and principals were more likely to isolate the concept and discuss it separately. Teachers and principals each have their own perspective and foci, and the SLMS is the one who

considers the significance of flexible scheduling to supporting integration and learning most intensely. Determining the best way for the library program to support learning is what drives the SLMS's job. It is only one small part of everyone else's.

### **Assertion 10. Acceptance typically comes slowly and cannot be taken for granted**

In most cases, teachers did not welcome the new initiative with open arms. Some were excited about the possibilities, especially after planning time issues were dealt with, but others were unsure of how to work with flexible scheduling. They were hesitant to change what they thought had worked well in the past. Some of the SLMSs were tempted to abandon the idea after a short time because of resistance from teachers, but all persisted. They emphasized a need to outwait the seeming indifference or resistance and look for small successes on which to build. A feeling of success often took years, not just months. While they did not name patience as a virtue, it certainly seemed to be something most of them could have mentioned.

### **Assertion 11. Implementation is never truly complete**

Fullan's (1991) description of change stages suggests that continuation or institutionalization happens once the new initiative has become the way things are done. Fullan describes the change process, however, as being very complex, and one of those complexities appears in this instance. In each of these schools, one could argue that flexible scheduling had become the way of doing things. That does not mean, however, that the implementation phase was completed. Even though flexible scheduling had been introduced in these schools a number of years ago (one of them twenty-one years at the time of the first interview), the task of selling the initiative never ends. New teachers, new principals, and new district administrators often mean training or convincing new people. Even in schools where everyone was delighted by the way in which the library supports learning, the possibilities of additional classes, funding cuts, or less visionary leadership raised the specter of SLMSs being required to cover planning time some day in the future.

## **Differences and variations**

Each school in the study had unique characteristics that may have affected implementation and outcomes. How much do the differences between these flexible scheduling environments matter? In a study of this size and nature, it is impossible to establish the impact of the differences that appeared. The appendix provides the stories of each of these schools through a description of the characteristics and context of each school, the operational definition of flexible scheduling in each case, the way in which flexible scheduling was introduced, how teacher planning time was provided in each school, and which programmatic feature was the key to implementation. Some of the differences emerging from these stories, and from a comparison with the Library Power schools in the Shannon study (1996) provide food for thought.

## **Terminology**

Much has been written about what flexible scheduling is and is not. Some authors interchangeably use flexible scheduling and flexible access while others differentiate between the two. In several cases in this study, flexible scheduling was used to describe both flexible access to the library and its materials and a way of scheduling the library on a short-term basis rather than long term, to allow for access at point of need. In at least one case, the library was scheduled separately from the SLMS. In another, the schedule for using the library and the SLMS was variable, but students did not have completely flexible access to the materials.

How much does a definition that is common across situations matter? In the schools involved in this study, the definitions expressed by teachers, SLMSs, and principals had common elements, but in each school the way in which the schedule in the library made a difference to what was happening in the school was a little different. In all schools, it was possible to discuss the impact of a schedule without necessarily having common terminology. The fact that, in one school, the SLMS and principal talked about flexible scheduling and the teachers called it *the open library concept* did not seem to matter at all. They had a common view of what happened in that library regardless of terminology. The definitions and manifestations of *flexible scheduling* across the six schools varied, but within each school the understanding was relatively common among those interviewed. That common understanding meant that the expectations within the school were generally clear and shared. This common understanding, however, had grown from experience, and did not exist in the beginning in any of the cases. The shared understanding had grown and changed over time.

Because the schools in the Shannon study (1996) were part of the Library Power program, their definition and understanding of flexible scheduling after one year was one that they had inherited as part of the program and learned through further professional development. And because the school district as a whole participated in the Library Power initiative, there was district support and professional development provided. SLMSs met regularly to discuss what was happening in their schools and develop further plans and ideas. They made joint presentations to their schools, which probably had the effect of maintaining a relatively common and shared interpretation of flexible scheduling across the district. Educators in Library Power schools began with a more unified understanding of what flexible scheduling meant than did those in the six schools in the current study, but after only a year the Library Power schools already were somewhat dissimilar in their interpretation and implementation of flexible scheduling. It would be interesting to know whether the definition and manifestation of flexible scheduling in the Library Power schools has evolved ten years later into something that is unique to each school, as occurred in the schools in the current study.

## **Support staff**

Professional literature strongly supports the need for adequate support staff to enable SLMSs to do the collaborative planning and teaching that flexible scheduling should

support (e.g., Donham van Deusen 1995; AASL and AECT 1998). The instructional supervisor from the district in the Shannon (1996) study wrote a successful grant proposal to provide full-time clerical help in the Library Power schools (161). In the current study, there was wide variation in the amount of support staff time available. These ranged from no paid support staff in Ferndale, the largest school, to two other staff members working in the Castlegate library, one of the smallest schools. Clearly, having other people working in the library made a difference, but each SLMS was able to function on a flexible schedule regardless of whether there was someone else working in the library. These SLMSs seemed to have the same shortage of time to complete their work that anecdotal evidence suggests most SLMSs deal with. Even in Castlegate School, which had the highest number of support staff hours, the SLMS did her selection of materials at home in the evenings. In some cases, teachers identified a need for further support staff or suggested that the reason flexible scheduling works well in the school is because there are other people available to manage the daily operations of the library. In Ferndale, where no support staff existed, student volunteers were used wherever possible to carry out many duties. The SLMS seemed resigned to the lack of support staff, although she did recognize that she could provide better access if she had clerical help. While this report is not suggesting that support staff are not valuable and important, clearly, none of these SLMSs used a shortage of support staff as an excuse to abandon a flexible schedule.

### **Degrees of flexibility**

In spite of the fact that all of these SLMSs had classified their libraries as being flexibly scheduled, these schools also varied in the degree of flexibility built into their schedules. All but one school had some classes that operated with a fixed schedule for something. If some classes (usually kindergarten and first grade) operated on a fixed schedule, the arrangement was made consensually, not imposed by an administrator. In some cases, teachers of kindergarten and first grade regularly brought their children at the same time every week, but they still booked that time regularly, not once for the entire year. Teachers of the youngest children consistently believed that they needed to be exposed to the library through regular visits. If fixed scheduling existed for older students, it was most often just for book exchange. In all cases, time was also available for the changeable, short-term scheduling usually expected within a flexibly scheduled library. SLMSs varied in their reaction to the requests for a fixed time from some of their teachers. While all who used it were accepting of the practice, some still hoped to change it.

After one year, the school in the Shannon study that had introduced fully flexible scheduling was moving to a mixed schedule where the kindergarten and first-grade classes would have a fixed time period for storytime, to accommodate the different teaching styles of teachers and to enable the SLMS to build a relationship with the children when they begin school (162). The other school began implementing flexible scheduling on a gradual basis, maintaining a fixed schedule on some days and providing flexible time during other days. It is not known whether this schedule was continued throughout the three years of the program or whether the degree of flexibility increased.

In both the Shannon study and the current one, the SLMSs strove to accommodate the needs of their teachers and work with them within a framework of understanding and practice that was most meaningful to them.

### **Introduction of flexible scheduling**

The introduction of flexible scheduling came about in a variety of ways in the current study, unlike the Library Power schools in the Shannon study, in which flexible scheduling was mandated and introduced through considerable professional development. In some cases in this study, flexible scheduling was initiated on a district-wide basis, with assistance from district coordinators. In other cases the SLMS broached the possibility either with the principal or the teachers. Some schools introduced flexible scheduling gradually over the years and some schools changed in all grades at once. Several SLMSs provided readings for their principals in support of their proposal and in some cases, the principal, teachers, or SLMS visited other schools to see how flexible scheduling worked elsewhere. However, very little professional development was provided in these schools because the curriculum initiative that flexible scheduling was designed to support was already in place to some extent in these schools and the change was usually seen by SLMSs as structural rather than curricular.

In most schools, the concern of losing planning time was an issue, as it was in the Library Power schools. Each school in the current study solved that problem by providing an alternative way to provide teacher planning time, sometimes creatively constructing or applying a new alternative (e.g., science lab, Choices program, IDEAS program). For the two schools in the Shannon study, alternative planning times were established in one school but not the other.

The impetus for introducing flexible scheduling was different in the Library Power schools and the schools in the current study. Flexible scheduling was mandated in the two Library Power schools, as was collaboration between teachers and the SLMS. The effect must have been both positive and negative--there must have been some resentment by some teachers who did not understand how this method of using the library could be an improvement over the status quo, but the experience of seeing positive learning results from their collaborations may have convinced some of these teachers in the end. In the current study, there was no such external impetus, and in many cases, the teachers could choose the way in which they would take advantage of the innovation, if at all. In some cases, principals made it clear that teachers were expected to cooperate with this new way of scheduling, but in other cases, principals provided support merely by showing approval. In spite of the lack of an external force in most cases, flexible scheduling did come to be accepted as a preferred mode by most teachers, possibly because the curriculum initiative that flexible scheduling was designed to facilitate was typically already in place to some extent when flexible scheduling was introduced. The innovation just made sense, although usually it was not immediately appreciated.

### **Rogers's diffusion of innovation model applied**

How does flexible scheduling as an innovation in these six schools relate to the elements of Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovation model? The model considers the likelihood of an innovation catching on in light of the five elements previously described.

*Relative advantage* means that the idea must be seen as an improvement. In these schools, most interviewees believed that in terms of promoting student learning, flexible scheduling (which in most cases was mixed with fixed scheduling) was better than an entirely fixed schedule. If an SLMS introduced the initiative but the decision was reversed before the relative advantages could be demonstrated, *relative advantage* would not be realized.

The element of *compatibility* is concerned with how well the innovation fits with the "existing values, past experiences, and needs" (15). In these cases, the innovation was highly compatible with learning initiatives such as curriculum integration and literacy and reading initiatives. It was less compatible initially with accepted experience of how teacher planning time is traditionally provided, and until benefits were demonstrated, with perceived needs. Only with appropriate changes that replaced what past experience had suggested was necessary was the innovation accepted broadly.

*Complexity* involves the degree of difficulty inherent in an innovation. Some teachers were concerned with how difficult it was to provide adequate book exchange time for students in a very busy, flexibly scheduled library (but without completely flexible access). Others believed that it was too difficult to establish good habits or provide good literature-based experiences for small children under a completely flexible schedule, which meant that in most schools, the younger children at least had a regularly scheduled portion of time each week. Other difficulties could be a busy but understaffed library, where lack of service meant that using the library became too difficult. While this problem did not appear to exist in these schools, a few interviewees worried about the possibility.

*Trialability* means that some experimentation should be possible. Some schools did introduce flexible scheduling gradually, and others tried a completely flexible schedule before introducing an element of fixedness back into it, meaning that there are ways in which flexible scheduling can be tried in order to find the best solution for the particular school.

*Observability* allows others to see the effects of an innovation. This element was demonstrated by principals and SLMSs who visited other schools who could demonstrate successful flexible scheduling. Principals were also able to observe vicariously by reading about flexible scheduling in articles provided by SLMSs. Some SLMSs advised others to build on small successes and share them with others to make positive outcomes observable.

## **Conclusions and implications**

Some conclusions can be drawn from this study, but it is impossible to generalize from them. Implications can be considered, however. One conclusion is that in these schools, flexible scheduling was merely a tool that facilitated other programmatic features. No one implemented flexible scheduling and then tried to figure out what to do with it. SLMSs did not separate flexible scheduling from the educational initiative it was designed to support. Therefore, it is likely to be important to answer the "why" question before the "how" question. There must be a reason to use a flexible schedule, and that reason should relate to student learning. SLMSs hoping to introduce the concept will need to sell the program, not the schedule. As one SLMS said, "Sell in terms of what they stand to gain--you've got something they need."

SLMSs interested in implementing flexible scheduling should be aware that they cannot expect to begin with a shared understanding or appreciation of what flexible scheduling can mean to their school. They should consider what the common understanding is of the place the library plays in student learning and build upon that. If there has been little or no previous connection with curriculum, then the place to start is in involvement with learning. The understanding of what flexible scheduling can offer and how it can operate will develop, mature, and change over time. Even the original conceptual understanding of the SLMS might change as the situation is adapted to the participants' needs. In one case, the SLMS's title was being changed to include "curriculum coordinator," which reflects a much broader curriculum role than she had ever envisioned when she first began to think about how the library could be most effectively scheduled and used.

Another conclusion is that constant vigilance is necessary if the implementation is to become institutionalized. This means initial education of all concerned, with special attention to teaching teachers how to take advantage of flexible scheduling. It means ongoing education of teachers, principals, and upper administration. It requires attention to whether students at any grade levels are falling through the cracks, whether any classes are not getting adequate exposure to the library program and resource-based learning, and whether some teachers might neglect to involve library services when the library is off their radar screen on a regular basis.

Those who struggle to introduce an ideal concept of flexible scheduling should keep in mind that, in practice, flexible scheduling is adapted to meet the needs of particular schools. There is no one right way to introduce or carry out a flexible schedule, but the evidence provided from these six schools suggests that it will work most successfully when it is meeting a program and curricular need. It is unknown to what degree Library Power schools with mandated flexible scheduling have maintained flexibility after the funding period ended. It should be reassuring, however, to know that some schools have maintained flexible scheduling for as long as twenty years, and it continues to promote and facilitate the curriculum initiatives that it was initially designed to support.

Understanding the complexity involved with diffusion of innovations can help those responsible for implementation to effectively plan. Flexible scheduling is clearly not an easy solution, but well worth the effort. It will not make life easier but it can help make

learning more meaningful. As does any tool used effectively and appropriately, it can maximize the success of the endeavor.

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**Table 1:** School Characteristics

<b>Public/ private</b>	<b>Grades</b>	<b>Socioeconomic or other relevant descriptor</b>	<b>No. of students</b>	<b>No. of classroom teachers</b>	<b>No. of SLMSs</b>	<b>Support staff time</b>
School A Public	K-5	Primarily middle to high	560	19	1.0	1.3
School B Public	K-6	Mixed; over half low to middle	n/a	22	1.0	1.0
School C Private	PreK-8 (data collected regarding PreK-5 only)	Gifted students	310	17	1.0	2.0
School D Public	K-5	Low to middle	220	10	0.5	0.5
School E Public	K-4	Middle to upper; middle	600	26	1.0	1.5
School F Public	K-6	Mixed	700	29	1.0	0.0

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## **Appendix. Stories of Successful Implementation of Flexible Scheduling**

Each implementation of flexible scheduling in the current study followed a different path, had different circumstances, and ended up in a different place. Each school had unique characteristics that may have affected implementation of flexible scheduling. Each of their stories contains important truths that could be useful to someone interested in promoting the concept of flexible scheduling, and considering the differences is just as important as examining patterns of consistency. Lincoln and Guba (1985) in their work *Naturalistic Inquiry* describe the extent to which a researcher, or inquirer, is responsible for ensuring that transfer is possible:

An inquirer cannot know all the contexts to which someone may wish to transfer working hypotheses; one cannot reasonably expect him or her to indicate the range of contexts to which there might be some transferability. But it is entirely reasonable to expect an inquirer to provide sufficient information about the context in which an inquiry is carried out so that anyone else interested in transferability has a base of information appropriate to the judgment. (125)

In this study there are potentially many transferable elements. School library media specialists (SLMSs) wishing to learn from these schools' experiences can compare these various situations with their own and determine how these stories relate to their own circumstances.

Each story provides a snapshot of the unique characteristics and context of the school involved; an interpretation of how flexible scheduling was defined and carried out in that school at the time of the interviews; how flexible scheduling was introduced originally; a description of how planning time was provided to teachers in that school at that point in time (because loss of teacher planning time seems to be one of the biggest concerns of teachers when flexible scheduling is introduced); and a keyword or phrase that best represents the programmatic feature that drove acceptance of flexible scheduling (see the main article for further explanation of the importance of a programmatic feature). All school and personal names are pseudonyms, selected and arranged alphabetically for ease of association.

### **School A. Atwood (Public)**

#### **Characteristics and context**

At the time of the first interview, Atwood School, located in a relatively affluent community, had a population of 560 students in grades K-5, representing mixed socioeconomic levels. Flexible scheduling had been introduced eighteen years earlier across the school district, and Alison, the SLMS who participated in the study, had been there from the inception. The interviewed principal had been in the school for only a year but was familiar with and in favor of flexible scheduling based on previous experience in another school district. The school library media center was staffed by a full time school library media specialist, 1.3 support staff and numerous volunteers. This school did not participate in any reading incentive programs.

#### **What is meant by "flexible scheduling" in this school?**

Teacher participants from Atwood suggested that the media center is an extension of the classroom, to be used as needed, regardless of availability of the SLMS. The principal and Alison both acknowledged that a media center's schedule exists, but that it is continually changing. Teachers select appropriate times to visit the library and sign up for that slot for the short term, but they do not have a set time each week. The principal mentioned that teachers plan with Alison for what will happen during that visit.

#### **What does a typical day in this library look like?**

The days are highly varied and variable. There could be many classes in the library at any given time, some doing research and others checking out books. A literary club might be taking place with parent volunteers working with individual children who have learning problems. Alison might be working with students in the library or in the classroom.

#### **How was flexible scheduling introduced?**

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Flexible scheduling was introduced district wide by the director and presented to principals. Alison convinced the principal to accept the idea because it would promote an integrated curriculum. At first many teachers did not know how to take advantage of the new arrangement because they did not necessarily view an SLMS as a teacher. In the interest of expanding the teachers' view, from the beginning Alison kept a plastic wipe-off schedule in full view so all teachers could see what she was doing at any given time and be aware of her involvement with teaching and curriculum.

### **How is teacher planning time provided in the school?**

Teachers of art, music, PE, the computer program, and the literacy program provide planning time for regular classroom teachers.

### **What programmatic feature emerged as key?**

The principal, the teachers, and the SLMS all emphasized research and the curriculum.

## **School B. Barker Heights (Public)**

### **Characteristics and context**

Barker Heights School contained Grades K-6 and was described as small by the SLMS (actual population numbers were not available). The school contained a mix of socioeconomic levels, with the majority being lower-middle. Flexible scheduling had been introduced by the current SLMS, Brenda, fourteen years prior to the beginning of data collection for this study. She had been in the school for two years at the time of implementation. The principal had also been in the school throughout the period since flexible scheduling was introduced and had always been highly supportive. A full-time support staff position existed, job-shared by two people, and four volunteers each spent about ten hours a week helping in the library media center. The school was actively involved in the Accelerated Reader program, but de-emphasized the point system. A multitude of reading and language arts programs existed in the school, with students reading for an hour each day.

### **What is meant by "flexible scheduling" in this school?**

Flexible scheduling involves unlimited access to the library and its materials, to allow use as needed for book checkout and for research. Classes have library passes that students use to gain access as needed. Access might be by individuals or classes. The principal defined flexible scheduling in terms of services being available at all times. She emphasized the role played by Brenda interacting with children for book selection. Brenda meets with each grade level every week to discuss the reading records of their students and to develop mini-units to support what students are reading about in their basal readers.

### **What does a typical day in this library look like?**

Students come in on an individual basis all day, after obtaining a pass from their teacher. Kindergarten and first grade schedule their classes on a fixed basis for a fifteen-minute storytime. These students are still able to visit the library at other times during the day as needed. Brenda spends a lot of her time in reading guidance with individual students across all grade levels. Classes are able to come to the library to do research as needed and parents can drop in and borrow books.

### **How was flexible scheduling introduced?**

Brenda approached the principal with an idea of how students' use of the library could be more effective. Because of mutual respect between principal and Brenda, the principal trusted her idea to be sound. As a teacher, the principal had felt a need for a more flexible way of using a library and the services of a SLMS, which made her receptive to the idea. She could easily see the need for expanded access but had been unable to bring flexible scheduling about in her first principalship, due to lack of support among staff. At this school, with the SLMS an enthusiastic driving force, the experience was quite different. Flexible scheduling was introduced gradually over the years, starting with the sixth grade

and moving down by grade levels. Teachers were consulted about the proposed change and were part of the decision. Because the teachers were hesitant initially about losing their breaks, the principal reassigned a teacher to the science lab to provide those breaks. As a result teachers were less concerned about losing a break previously covered by the SLM program. The teachers agreed to have larger classes in order to make the change and gain the benefits provided by a flexibly scheduled library.

In the beginning, Brenda assumed that all teachers had the same understanding of flexible scheduling as she did, but she discovered that some teachers had different expectations. She found in some cases that her collaborative suggestions and open attitude were interpreted as a willingness to take over the class while the teacher left. Brenda overcame this difference in interpretation by including roles for each of the teachers in carrying out the collaboratively planned lesson. The teachers developed a new understanding of what collaboration meant, and the SLMS learned to share tasks.

Kindergarten and first-grade teachers requested a fixed schedule to provide an opportunity for children to be read to by someone with the expert knowledge about books and authors that Brenda has. Initially this period of fixed time was forty or forty-five minutes, but has diminished over the years to fifteen minutes.

### **How is teacher planning time provided in the school?**

Teachers plan during the times when students go to music, computer lab, science lab, art, and PE. The principal recognized the fact that when flexible scheduling was implemented, had she not been able to replace the planning time previously provided by the SLMS with time in the science lab, the transition might not have been as easy.

### **What programmatic feature emerged as key?**

The active reading programs, including Accelerated Reader, seemed to drive the acceptance of, and need for, flexible scheduling.

## **School C. Castlegate (Private)**

### *School characteristics and context*

Castlegate School was a small school, with a population of 310 students in Grades PreK to 8. Data collected represent only up to grade 5 in this school, because grades 6 to 8 are considered middle school. Flexible scheduling had been introduced when Corrine, the current SLMS, became librarian, almost twenty years prior to the first interview. The principal interviewed for the study had been in the school for a year prior to the interview and was highly supportive of the concept of flexible scheduling because it supported his constructivist views. A new principal had arrived when the second interview of the SLMS took place, and this principal indicated her support by participating in the library program wherever possible, e.g., reading to children. Corrine believed that this principal's focus on curriculum mapping would enable her to involve some teachers who tended to use the library less with their classes. This school's population consisted of gifted students, primarily from upper socioeconomic levels. The school employed one full-time SLMS (who was interviewed), one full-time assistant librarian, and one part-time cataloguer. Teachers tended to call all these people "librarians." A volunteer helped in the library twice a week. The school used no formal reading incentive program but the library media center provided a great deal of support for reading through locally developed programs.

### **What is meant by "flexible scheduling" in this school?**

Students come to the library whenever they need to. Most students pass by or through the library on their way to and from the classroom and they use it frequently at those times. Because of the close proximity to many classrooms, teachers also send students to the library whenever they need information. Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten have a fixed schedule. They are not as close to the library but as they learn their way around the building they are likely to come on their own or with an aide during other times. Each elementary grade except third and fifth (at the time of the second interview with Corrine) has a fixed time each week during which they come to the library, some just for book exchange, some for a story time and book sharing, some for research. The principal described flexible scheduling as not locking in a schedule and adjusting to need. He also described multiple uses going on at once, such as small groups, getting assistance from someone, or working with the technology. Teachers described flexible scheduling as the ability to send or take students to

the library at the point of need, in groups or alone, without having to check a schedule or determine availability. Corrine meets with teachers regularly to plan curriculum and share ideas.

### **What does a typical day in this library look like?**

The library is open any time the school is open, because it is located in an open area of the school, with no doors closing it off. Every day is different. Students exchange books or access the Internet first thing in the morning and then move to their classrooms. Parents might also come in to borrow from the parent collection. Students come to the library throughout the day on an individual basis or in small groups, where they might exchange books or sit down and read. Tutors conduct lessons and meet with parents in the library. Sometimes teachers spend their break in the library, where they might find coffee and bagels, and may meet with the librarians or each other. Some classes or groups could be booked in to do research, or individuals might spontaneously come from the classroom for this purpose. In this school, flexible scheduling can apply to both the facility and the SLMS, since it is possible to book the library without booking Corrine (and vice versa) or to book both.

### **How was flexible scheduling introduced?**

After a year or two in the position with a fixed schedule, teaching research skills in isolation, Corrine decided to change the policy, because the previous system was not meeting the needs of the curriculum or the students. Corrine described the principal who was in the school at the time of the introduction of flexible scheduling as a critical thinker and problem solver. She asked important questions and trusted Corrine to follow through on the elements they discussed, such as making sure that all children were exposed to the information literacy learning they needed. Since teachers in this school were flexible and many were already doing project-based learning, they could appreciate the value of integrating the teaching done by the SLMS with what was going on already and recognized the need for a more flexible arrangement. Corrine was gradually able to convince teachers who did not use the library to bring their classes by improving the collection in such a way that students would be disadvantaged if they were not given access to this improved collection.

### **How is teacher planning time provided in the school?**

PE and music times provide some planning time. The school has also implemented a Choices program, primarily in first and second grade during the afternoons. During this time all the classes at those grade levels disperse to a variety of different classes, usually in small groups, offered by teachers, teacher aides, and parents. Choices change from week to week, and a single teacher teaches the same course to different students each day of the week. Each teacher has one afternoon during which they do not offer a Choice subject, and that time is then used for planning. Team planning also takes place after school.

### **What programmatic feature emerged as key?**

A mix of reading promotion and research makes this flexible schedule necessary.

## **School D. Delaney (Public)**

### **School characteristics and context**

Delaney School's population of 220 students from K-5 represents a low to middle socioeconomic level. Flexible scheduling was introduced within the school district almost ten years prior to the first interview, and in this particular school eight years prior, at the time this SLMS (Diana) moved to this school. The principal who was interviewed had moved to this school two years before the interview took place and was highly supportive of flexible scheduling. This principal had worked with Diana previously as a teacher and was familiar with the things that could happen in an effective school library media center. There had been several other principals throughout the years since flexible scheduling had been introduced, all of whom were supportive. The school has a Chapter 1 reading program. A new computer lab was created next to the library which demanded a lot of Diana's time. She works part-time and has a half-time aide. Three volunteers work ten hours a week. The library is kept open all week due to the staggered times that the two staff members and the volunteers work.

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## **What is meant by "flexible scheduling" in this school?**

Diana defined flexible scheduling in terms of what happens in terms of teaching and learning. She stated that "we have the schedule meet the need, not the teaching meet the schedule." Collaborative planning and teaching are important elements, with teachers describing working as a team and meeting objectives together. No classes have fixed schedules and children check out books as needed, although one teacher wistfully wished for more access to a very overworked part-time media specialist who tries her hardest to meet children's needs. This teacher believed that a fixed schedule for the younger children would be preferable but was impossible in these circumstances.

## **What does a typical day in this library look like?**

Students check out materials as needed throughout the day, often coming individually with their teachers' permission, while at the same time Diana is teaching a class or working with a small group. Diana spends about two thirds of her day teaching and the other third planning with teachers, preparing for future classes, ordering, locating resources, developing units. Occasionally students might use the library to take a missed test. Teachers might bring whole classes or send small groups as needed.

## **How was flexible scheduling introduced?**

The idea grew out of the 1988 *Information Power* document. The district coordinator met with teacher committees from schools to discuss how the ideas in *Information Power* could be implemented, and these teachers brought the ideas back to the schools. Diana followed up by reading further about the initiative. She had had experience with a fixed schedule and was strongly in favor of doing something different. She said, "I knew what not to do. I hated [fixed scheduling] . . . because [learning] wasn't integrated." She began to work with individual teachers, gradually training them to become collaborative by involving them more and more in the activities that were going on during projects. The various principals have trusted Diana to bring flexible scheduling in at her own pace.

Because Diana works part-time, it took awhile to settle on a working schedule for her that would support classes needing to come to the library daily for a period of time to work on a project. After trying several schedules, she settled on one in which she worked several consecutive mornings and several consecutive afternoons, rather than a more sporadic schedule. Training the teachers to consider the possibility of working in the library for consecutive days was a key to making the schedules work. Diana does some teaching in the classroom as well to keep the collaboration active.

## **How is teacher planning time provided in the school?**

Teachers plan while their students attend their music and PE classes. They do not necessarily have a planning time at the same time as others in their grade level. Kindergarten teachers plan during their lunch break, because their students do not have PE or music. Teachers also plan before and after school.

## **What programmatic feature emerged as key?**

Key elements are collaborative teaching and the integration of information literacy, technology, and curriculum.

## **School E. Ellerton (Public)**

### **Characteristics and context**

Ellerton School's population is about six hundred students, from K-4. The community is primarily middle to upper-middle socioeconomic level. The SLMS, Evelyn, had been in the school for ten years prior to the time of the first interview and had introduced flexible scheduling after about five years, soon after the principal involved in this study arrived at the school. The principal was very supportive of the idea of flexible scheduling. This school has a very supportive PTA organization and parents sponsor and run a "Parents as Reading Partners" (PARP) program. The library media center has 1.5 full-time support staff and several volunteers.

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## **What is meant by "flexible scheduling" in this school?**

The library is available as needed for research, independent work, and group work. Kindergarten and first grade have a fixed schedule, although often only half the class comes at a time during this fixed period, and anyone is able to schedule their class as needed. Grade levels have certain times during each day during which they may exchange books, sometimes on an individual basis and sometimes as a whole class, but they can also visit the library throughout the day. Some teachers also identified flexible access as a feature, when students can be sent alone or in small groups for a specific purpose, such as exchanging books or looking up information. The principal saw the plan as a way to make student activity in the library meaningful. She suggested that students are able to use the library in a "real-world" manner--for research or to find quick information when they need it. Teachers referred to the concept as "open library."

## **What does a typical day in this library look like?**

The library opens before school for teachers. Students arrive at school by bus and proceed to their classrooms, from which they can come to the library if they wish. Teachers may schedule their classes into the library for blocks of time spanning several days, during which time half the class might be with the SLMS and half with the teacher. More than one class might be scheduled into the library during that time. Sometimes teachers will schedule whole classes to work on research projects for a regular block of time or they might send part of the class down to work as a group.

## **How was flexible scheduling introduced?**

A shared-decision-making team was exposed to the concept and set up a task force to explore it. Evelyn provided them with extensive documentation to assist their deliberations. She had read about the idea extensively, but a previous principal had been opposed to it. The new principal was not only very receptive to the idea, she actively promoted it. The change was made at the same time as the library moved to a new, larger location with more space for multiple groups of students at the same time. The time was right for the change. As the principal said, "You just have to see the right moment and seize it." Evelyn discussed the initiative with teachers and planned how to use it effectively.

## **How is teacher planning time provided in the school?**

Planning time is provided by the PE, music, and art teacher. This school also provides an IDEAS program, involving the GT teacher (Gifted and Talented). All teachers in a single grade level plan at the same time each day.

## **What programmatic feature emerged as key?**

Research across grade levels takes place in this school, with each grade becoming successively more independent.

## **School F. Ferndale (Public)**

### **Characteristics and context**

Ferndale School was used in the pilot study and was the largest of all the schools, with seven hundred students in grades K-6. The population comes from a mix of socioeconomic backgrounds. Flexible scheduling was introduced district wide about five years prior to the study, when the school had only been open a year or two. The SLMS (Frances), who had been in the school since it opened, was responsible for implementing it in her school. The principal came to this school at the same time as Frances did. The school population has grown considerably since it opened. This school library media center has no support staff and has about one hour a day of volunteer participation. Student volunteers carry out many tasks for the SLMS.

## **What is meant by "flexible scheduling" in this school?**

Interviewees described flexible scheduling as a variable schedule to allow the library to be used for doing research. Planning and carrying out integrated library projects is an important element. No classes have fixed schedules.

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## **What does a typical day in this library look like?**

The first forty-five minutes and the last hour of the day are set aside for book exchange, at which time any student may come to the library. Otherwise, classes might be scheduled in to work on integrated library units. Typically, an entire grade level will work on a similar unit at the same time of year. If there is room in the schedule, teachers may bring their classes to the library at a moment's notice. If the library schedule is too full, teachers may request a collection of materials be sent to their classrooms to work with.

## **How was flexible scheduling introduced?**

The idea originally came from the district library services director, who visited all the schools to introduce the concept. The move to flexible scheduling was taking place across the district. Some of the teachers visited other schools to view the way in which it operated. The teachers voted initially on whether to introduce flexible scheduling, with a 50/50 result. The principal agreed not to introduce it that year, but assured teachers that it would begin the next year. Teachers were concerned about losing the break previously provided by students going to the library media center.

## **How is teacher planning time provided in the school?**

Teachers plan while students go to PE and music classes. Children leave school forty-five minutes before teachers do, and that time is used for planning. Grade levels tend to plan together once a week.

## **What programmatic feature emerged as key?**

All grade levels are involved in integrated units planned in collaboration between Frances and the teachers at each level. These might be major units or mini-units. As students' information literacy skills develop in sophistication over the years, the planning necessary and the amount of teacher direction diminishes.

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