1-1-2004

A qualitative study of how one building assistance team solves problems

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A qualitative study of how one building assistance team solves problems

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Education (Special Education)

Program of Study Committee:
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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2004

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers sometimes find themselves exhausting their resources and feeling frustrated as they try to help failing students. Fortunately, they can seek the help of their colleagues by going to the building assistance team and using the pre-referral intervention process. The process is designed to help teachers implement both academic and behavioral interventions so their students can be successful. The term *pre-referral* simply means that before a student can ever be referred to special education, he must go through the pre-referral process. Pre-referral, problem-solving teams can be called building intervention cadres, child study teams, teacher assistance teams, or building assistance teams. For simplicity's sake I exclusively use the term building assistance team for my thesis.

Purpose

My purpose was to explore the nature of problem-solving with one elementary school's building assistance team. The guiding questions, in no particular order, for my study were:

1. Do classroom teachers understand the purpose of the problem-solving process?
2. How do personal interaction skills of those involved affect the problem-solving process?
3. Does the building assistance team use a discernable process?
4. How does the team measure efficacy?
5. What type of administrative support is available to classroom teachers and the building assistance team?
6. To what extent are parents involved in the problem-solving process?

Educational Rationale

As a special education teacher one of my primary responsibilities is to chair and participate in a building assistance team made up of classroom teachers, special education teachers, and building support staff. The purpose of the team is to assist classroom teachers in finding successful teaching strategies that enable at-risk students to remain in the general education classroom. The building assistance team's goal is to make special education placement a last resort. My job experience proves that some teachers, including me, are frustrated with the problem-solving process and its efficacy. It is my present job, and more precisely my commitment to at-risk students, that motivated this research to look at one such group working through the problem-solving process.

I envisioned this qualitative research to be a starting point in accepting imperfection, learning useful problem-solving strategies, and finally, understanding team dynamics as I strive to be a positive, constructive team member of my own building assistance team. As Glesne (1998) states, "qualitative studies are best at contributing to a greater understanding of perceptions, attitudes, and processes" (p. 24). To be successful professionally, I need to help teachers through the problem-solving process so that they can decrease their frustration while helping struggling students become more successful. Who better to provide individualized support systems to teachers and students than a special education teacher (Hayek, 1987)? If I gain understanding of the problem-solving process used by one team of teachers, I will be able to better assist teachers and students at my school. Not only will I have a deeper knowledge base from which to draw, but also concrete strategies to use with my own team.

Definition of Problem-solving

I combined the information, including an inferred process, from the school district's problem-solving manual, the school's problem-solving process documents, and Gutkin and Curtis's (1990) research to create a workable definition of problem-solving for this study. For the purpose of this study, problem-solving is defined as a seven-step process in which team members collaboratively solve classroom problems with the least intrusion but using the most intensive interventions possible. The seven steps come directly from Gutkin and Curtis: a) define the primary problem, b) analyze the forces impinging on the problem, c) brainstorm alternative strategies, d) evaluate and choose a strategy, e) specify consultant and consultee responsibilities, f) implement the strategy, and g) evaluate the effectiveness and recycle if necessary. It is this definition, along with the professional literature, that guided my research.

Research Structure

My thesis chapters do not follow the traditional thesis structure, but rather they reflect the way in which I conducted my research. I began with guiding questions stemming from my work experience regarding building assistance teams. Second, I developed a plan of procedures and data analysis for carrying out the study. My third step was to read the professional literature to try and make sense of my guiding questions. Fourth, I conducted the actual research by observing, interviewing and reviewing documents, and finally, I analyzed the data. The proceeding chapters follow my research step by step: a) purpose and guiding questions, b) methods, c) literature review, d) data analysis, and e) discussion.

CHAPTER 2. METHODS

This was a qualitative study of one building assistance team and its use of the problem-solving process. The study was centered around six guiding questions: a) Do classroom teachers understand the purpose of the problem-solving process? b) How do personal interaction skills of those involved affect the problem-solving process? c) Does the building assistance team use a discernable process? d) How does the team measure efficacy? e) What type of administrative support is available to classroom teachers and the building assistance team? and f) To what extent are the parents involved in the problem-solving process? These questions served to guide the study of better understanding how this one team of teachers solves problems.

Research Subject

The school used for the study was chosen, in part, because an administrator in the district recommended it. This administrator indicated the building assistance team process at the school had been newly redesigned and the team was doing an excellent job. This school was also chosen because the principal was the only one, out of six, to return a personal call.

Procedures

The duration of this qualitative study was from October to March. The first step after permission had been granted by Iowa State University and the school district was to locate a school and meet with the principal to explain the purpose of the study. Once the principal had consented, the building assistance team members and the parent were informed of the study. All team members and the parent were in consensus on participating in the study.

Consent forms were signed in October and the initial meeting date was scheduled for November.

The meetings were observed and tape-recorded, as were the follow-up interviews with individual teachers, to ensure accuracy for the analysis. The recordings of the meetings were transcribed within a week of occurrence. Directly after each meeting and interview the researcher reflected on the meeting and made notes about impressions and questions for the study. After the first meeting, follow-up interviews were conducted with individual team participants.

Meanwhile, the student intervention was implemented for a six-week period, with the winter break falling in the middle of those six weeks. The follow-up meeting occurred in January, with the intent that the process would come to completion by the end of February. Further follow-up interviews were conducted after the second meeting. The final meeting was scheduled several times starting in late February, but had not taken place by the end of the study in March.

Ethnographic Methods

The methods used in this study were ethnographic in nature and included observation, interviews, and document review. The central data collection was through the observations of one elementary school's building assistance team as it worked through the case of one student. Two problem-solving meetings were observed and tape-recorded: the initial referral meeting, and a follow-up meeting. The researcher acted only as a silent observer during these meetings.

The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Three participants-the classroom teacher, the school psychologist, and the special education teacher-were interviewed twice,

once after each meeting. One interview was conducted with the school principal. The majority of interview questions were determined prior to the study, but some follow-up questions developed from the observations and interviews. The questions were developed through consideration of the guiding questions, the researcher's work experience, and the professional literature. Most interview questions were the same at each interview for the explicit purpose of member checking and validating the data, but several questions were individualized in order to elicit the specific information needed. Finally, the interviews lasted about twenty minutes.

The document analysis consisted of reviewing a three-page document specific to the school's purposes and the school district's problem-solving training manual. Information gleaned from these documents served to define problem-solving for this study, determine if a discernable process is used in practice by the building assistance team, and understand how the district's problem-solving process compares to the professional literature. These ethnographic methods were used to understand one building assistance team's problem-solving process.

Data Analysis

The analytic tool of choice for this study was conversation analysis, an open-minded approach that allows the events to guide the study (Glesne, 1998). A relatively new science, conversation analysis developed out of R.F. Bales' *Interaction Process Analysis* conducted in the late 1940s (Psathas, 1995). Bales described his method of examining conversation to be a "problem-solving process" (as cited in Psathas, p. 4). It seemed appropriate, then, that I use this "problem-solving process" known as conversation analysis to analyze the problem-solving process of one building assistance team.

Conversation analysis studies everyday talk in context, making sure participants are aware of their own perspectives (Sanders, 1999). It is an analytic tool used in interpretive research. Ten Have (1999) explains conversation analysis as finding patterns in, and explaining the logic of, everyday talk. Turn-taking is the primary analysis method used in conversation analysis. Malone (1997) points out that turn-taking is what intrinsically motivates people to listen so they can take their turn in the conversation. Rather than a focus on isolated units of speech, conversational analysts focus on sequences and turns in sequences (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984).

As a research tool, conversation analysis takes on a rigorous and systematic approach. The idea of rigor is a major argument for using conversation analysis because it provides depth and connections between concrete events and interpretation (Fitch, 1994). Some basic assumptions of conversation analysis are: "a) order is a produced orderliness; b) order is produced by the members *in situ*; c) members orient to that order themselves; d) discovery, description, and analysis of produced orderliness are the analyst's task; e) frequency of how often phenomena occur is to be set aside" (Samra-Fredericks, 1998, p. 164, as adapted from Psathas, 1995, p. 2-3). Order is always assumed, but it is the analyst's goal to discover the order and thereby develop theory.

Part of what makes conversation analysis special is pulling out the subtleties in everyday talk and then making sense of them (Ten Have, 1999). To gain accurate knowledge of what is going on, conversation analysis must be conducted using authentic conversations that have been either audio- or video-recorded. Authentic conversation implies that neither the topic nor the speaker-turns are predetermined (Psathas, 1995). If the actual conversation is recorded, the data are considered reliable.

Studying ordinary talk is important because everyday talk is most common and society is organized through speech (Moerman, 1988). Talk has connections to how we present ourselves. As we talk we create our self-identity (Malone, 1997). "You and who you are taken to be, depends on your repeated performance over time of the talk that constitutes that identity" (Kitzinger, 2000, p. 170). Conversation analysis is oriented towards discovery of everyday social actions (Psathas, 1995). When conducting conversation analysis, the analyst should have no hypothesis (Samra-Fredericks, 1998) or motivation (Psathas, 1995). This concept fit well into my research model because I did not have an agenda, but rather I wanted to get an idea of what was really going on when it came to building assistance team meetings.

As I examined these meetings, which are primarily social processes, my goal was to discover the phenomena therein. Fitch (1994) defines conversation analysis as a "prominent visitor to qualitative approaches" (p. 32). She further defines qualitative research "to be, that which examines the qualities of communication phenomena" (p. 33). It is not only conversation analysis that comes out of social theory then, but qualitative research as well. It made the most sense then to use qualitative research to find meaning in the social interactions that occur during building assistance team meetings.

I used four strategies to interpret the data once the conversations of the problem-solving meetings were transcribed:

1. Turn-taking Organization
2. Sequence Organization
3. Repair Organization
4. Adjacency Pair Organization

Turn-taking is the very essence of conversation. Although it appears obvious that speakers take turns in conversation, how they come to change speakers is important to conversation analysis. I looked at whether speakers self-selected their turn, were selected by the previous speaker, or continued talking. It was useful to my study to determine whether the speakers were asserting themselves into the conversation or simply responding when prompted (Ten Have, 1999).

Sequence organization is simply the idea that "one thing can lead to another" (Sacks, 1992 as cited in Ten Have, 1999, p. 113). Sequences are affected by how a speaker orients himself to the conversation. A speaker who is willing to continue the sequence will react differently than a speaker who is reluctant to engage. The degree of willingness to participate can affect the turn-taking and tone of the conversation. I considered how the conversational sequences started, ended, and changed. Sequences reveal how speakers listen, understand, and acknowledge one another (Psathas, 1995).

Repair organization is an analytic strategy that deals with misunderstandings, mis-hearings, or, as Ten Have (1999) explains,trouble (p. 116). A repairable is an utterance that indicates a problem or misunderstanding, such as "huh?," "what?," "you mean," or "I don't understand." In fact, almost any utterance can be turned into a repairable and thereby indicate a problem in the conversation (Ten Have). I examined who initiated the repair, what happened just before the insertion of the repair, and how the speakers reacted to it. The repair organization helped me understand how the building assistance team participants understood one another and to what degree collaboration occurred.

My final strategy for analysis was the use of adjacency pair organization. These two-line adjacent utterances by two different speakers are small units of conversation that reveal

understanding, approval, agreement, appreciation, cooperation, failure, and correction. Examples of adjacency pairs are: "question-answer, greeting-greeting, offer-acceptance/refusal" (Ten Have, 1999, p. 20). The attitudes and opinions of the speakers became apparent, as did their degree of understanding and agreement. By examining the adjacency pairs I learned how the speakers worked through the problem-solving process.

CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

One purpose of this literature review is to orient the reader to the professional literature on building assistance teams and the problem-solving process. The second purpose, unique to qualitative research, is to convey the researcher's personal experiences and demonstrate how they relate to the literature. For qualitative research Glesne suggests "incorporating the literature as appropriate throughout the telling of the story" (1998, p. 21). This approach explains why personal experience is woven into the professional literature.

Each school year it is the same story at the urban, mid-west elementary school where I work as a special education teacher. Teachers inevitably find me the first week of school with their list of students who will "definitely be special ed." It is as if the students are doomed from day one or even before if a former teacher passes the word on about a student's skills. Fortunately, Public Law 94-142 protects students from being segregated and ensures that all students have access to the least restrictive learning environment. But with this law comes the dilemma of how to serve students in need of help because it is no longer an option to simply administer a test and place the discrepant student in the special education room. Instead, the pre-referral intervention model of using building assistance teams to problem-solve has been put into place to avoid excessive and inappropriate student referrals into special education (Bahr, Whitten, Dieker, Kocarek, & Manson, 1999; Graden, Casey, & Christenson, 1985; Gutkin, 1996; Hayek, 1987; Kovaleski, Gickling, Morrow, & Swank, 1999; Ormsbee, 2001; Safran & Safran, 1996). It "is a less restrictive means of gathering data about student performance than is a traditional psychological evaluation" (Graden, et al., 1985, p. 379). This pre-referral intervention model is mandated in most states (Gutkin; Ormsbee), and incorporates the problem-solving process.

When I first began attending building assistance team meetings at my school I was instantly frustrated. I'd taken one graduate course on collaborative consultation, and our meetings had little semblance to the model I had studied. Since then my perspective has evolved. First I found myself critiquing the team by finding all the inconsistencies between the professional literature and the way in which the team actually functioned. I saw only the steps and procedures our team was missing or doing incorrectly because it felt as if we were not actually doing any problem-solving. Hayek (1987) points out that discovering the negative attitudes of teachers helps determine areas for team improvement. I therefore decided to work on understanding what actually *does* occur and how to facilitate more effective meetings. I studied one team as it worked through the problem-solving process and examined the research literature pertaining to actualizing the pre-referral process.

The purpose of a building assistance team is to intervene and assist at-risk students in the general education setting (Graden, 1989; Hayek, 1987) to prevent special education referral. Simply stated, a building assistance team's purpose should be "to teach and intervene rather than to diagnose and place" (Graden, et al., 1985, p. 379). Graden (1989) suggests that there seems to be a misconception that building assistance teams are owned by special education and are a step towards placing students into special education. I see evidence of this misconception when one veteran teacher asks the same question at the beginning of each meeting: "So do you think this kid is special ed. or what?" Some teachers in my building believe the problem-solving process is simply a hoop they must jump through to get a student into special education. This belief is problematic because it separates general education and special education into two separate entities (Graden, 1989). Teachers must realize the problem-solving process is part of the pre-referral process, in which a team *appropriately*

determines which students do or do not qualify for special education services. The ultimate goal is to help students succeed by using intervention as failure prevention. Once the student has met success in the general education classroom there is no longer a need for future assessment and placement in special education.

I consistently hear the phrase "I need to get this student some help," but it is important to recognize that the priority is prevention of special education services, not automatic placement (Graden, et al., 1985; Gutkin, 1996; Hayek, 1987). Because the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 mandate that a student remain in the least restrictive environment (Graden et al., 1985, Kovaleski, et al., 1999), general educators and special educators must work together rather than operate independently. A team should reflect collegiality and collaboration (Hayek) as it works to provide the most intensive intervention with the least possible intrusion in the general education setting.

Beyond trying to prevent special education placement, a building assistance team should be able to demonstrate cultural awareness and competence by responding to and meeting diverse student needs (Bahr, et al., 1999; Craig, Hull, Haggart, & Perez-Selles, 2000). This goal requires that teachers have a flexible mind, the capacity to self-assess, the ability to understand one's own culture, and the willingness to accept differences across groups. In other words, teachers must respond optimally to all students to increase student achievement (Craig et al.). This idea of cultural competence parallels my philosophy of special education: Each teacher should examine how she can change her teaching to meet a student's needs rather than assume something is wrong with the student (Graden, et al., 1985).

Given that a building assistance team's priority is to provide help (Burns, 1999), it raises the question of how to go about getting the students the help they need. What should the

process look like, and what is each team member's role? The process is repetitive and spiraling, meaning that a team will work back and forth through the following seven steps (Gutkin, 1996):

1. Define the primary problem.
2. Analyze the forces impinging on the problem.
3. Brainstorm alternative strategies.
4. Evaluate and choose a strategy.
5. Specify consultant and consultee responsibilities.
6. Implement the strategy.
7. Evaluate the effectiveness and recycle, if necessary.

Defining the problem may seem simplistic, but personal experience proves differently. Often a teacher will come to a problem-solving meeting with a list of ten to fifteen problem areas ranging from attention span to reading or math deficits. Gutkin suggests defining the highest priority problem, and collecting baseline data at this stage of the process. The data should be objective, to support the teacher's concerns (Ormsbee, 2001). It is important to identify a single problem if the intervention is to be successful (Kampwirth, 1999). Without a clearly defined problem, it is difficult to produce a clearly defined solution.

The purpose of analyzing the forces impinging on the problem "is to determine why a problem is occurring" (Gutkin, 1996). Problem identification must be more specific than stating, for example, that a student reads below grade level. Instead, the forces impinging on the problem must be analyzed so that an intervention strategy can be selected. This stage of the process is essentially the assessment stage (Gutkin, 1996). It is therefore important to look at the student and his problem with an ecological perspective by examining elements

such as home life, classroom situation, and behavior (Kampwirth, 1999). By considering all the possible influences on the problem, the team will have a better chance of developing an appropriate intervention.

Once the problem and the forces impinging on it have been clearly defined, the team begins brainstorming alternative strategies. "There are four general rules for brainstorming: (a) Generate as many ideas as possible, (b) avoid evaluating the quality of ideas that emerge, (c) engage in creative thinking, and (d) combine individual ideas so as to create new possibilities that are more than the sum of their parts" (Gutkin, 1996, p. 336). A common mistake I see with my team is the tendency to evaluate the ideas as they are generated. Critiquing the alternatives during the brainstorming step is a sure way to sabotage the effectiveness of the brainstorming step. It is only after the brainstorming step is complete that the team can then begin to evaluate and choose an alternative strategy.

Kampwirth (1999) points out that the strategy selected should "have the maximum impact for the minimal effort or intrusion into other classroom or family dynamics" (p. 135). Not only should the intervention be highly effective in solving the problem, but it also should be an intervention in which no new problems arise (Gutkin, 1996). Once an intervention seems appropriate for a student, Gutkin asserts that one must also consider how easily it can be integrated into the general education classroom and how acceptable it is for the teacher to implement. The freedom to accept or reject (Noell & Witt, 1999) the proposed intervention allows teachers to take ownership in the collaborative process.

The next step is to specify responsibilities to each team member. Every member should know exactly what role he or she plays in the intervention treatment. Furthermore, each member should be provided exact procedures in writing (Ormsbee, 2001). "Far too often,

teachers receive ambiguous suggestions that are destined to fail with the students because the teacher may not fully understand the strategy or has misunderstood verbal instructions during the meeting" (Ormsbee, 2001, p. 150). If the chosen intervention is clearly defined and understood, the likelihood of implementation increases.

Implementing the intervention is what Kampwirth (1999) refers to as "the moment of truth" (p. 135). This is the stage where resistance may surface (Kampwirth) or last minute glitches may occur (Gutkin, 1996). I have found at my school that there tends to be an implementation gap. What is verbally agreed on and what is actually done do not always coincide. Because the classroom teacher is essentially responsible for the actual implementation (Ormsbee, 2001), it would seem appropriate then to have an adequate support system to ensure implementation.

Four to six weeks after the intervention treatment has begun the team should meet to evaluate how well the intervention is working. At this stage objective data should once again be available to the building assistance team so it can analyze what needs to be done next. Depending on the results it may be necessary to repeat some of the problem-solving steps. As Gutkin (1996) points out, "failure should be looked upon as input for recycling back into the problem-solving process rather than as an end point" (p. 337). A problem may need to be defined more clearly or an intervention may need to be altered. The team can repeat and spiral through any of the steps in order to find a more effective strategy to help the student succeed.

Once roles are clearly defined, the team members should be trained (Hayek, 1987) to understand what each role entails, that is, assuming everyone on the team accepts the philosophy of the problem-solving process. Schram and Semmel (1984, as cited in Hayek)

suggest teams be developed over time rather than simply installed. This recommendation seems appropriate based on my experience working in schools. Teachers feel empowered and are more likely to adopt a philosophy or system if they have helped create it.

Although the problem-solving process is mandated, my hope is that teachers can see it as "a potent integrating force complementing the efforts to make interventions more effective" (Nunn & McMahan, 2000, p. 306) rather than a time-consuming process that has the same outcome no matter what the intervention. The terms *prereferral intervention* or *intervention assistance* (Graden, 1989) are used for the problem-solving process, and teams may be referred to as: Building assistance team, building intervention committee, teacher assistance team (Hayek, 1987), child study team, problem-solving team, or instructional support team (Kovaleski et al., 1999). Whatever the terminology used, the problem-solving process is one of collaborative consultation. The process encompasses non-hierarchical relationships (Graden, 1989; Kampwirth, 1999; Noell & Witt, 1999), voluntary participation (Sheridan, Welch, & Orme, 1996), shared responsibility (Noell & Witt), honest communication (Kampwirth), and locus of power in decision-making by classroom teachers (Graden).

When a classroom teacher brings a student case to the building assistance team in my school, she is usually at her wit's end and feels as though she has "tried everything." Frequently the student data is somewhat subjective and based on impression rather than fact. To develop effective interventions a team must gather objective student data prior to the first meeting and continue systematically throughout the process (Ormsbee, 2001). By keeping ongoing data, a team will be better equipped and have the confidence to make appropriate intervention decisions. Direct and frequent assessments are the only way to measure the outcomes (Nunn & McMahan, 2000). My special education training offers me experience

with this concept of frequent monitoring through progress monitoring, but I find that general educators consider it rather a burden.

Not only does data collection take on a systematic nature, but the actual problem-solving process should be systematic as well. To ensure systematic consistencies the team must document the student's problem (Ormsbee, 2001). The specific development of the intervention should be: a) targeted to the student's needs (Noell & Witt, 1999), b) systematic (Graden, Casey, & Christenson, 1985), and c) provided to the classroom teacher in writing (Ormsbee). The teacher must understand and buy into the intervention if it is to be carried out with integrity. Lastly, the team must help the teacher establish a monitoring system of the objective data to be collected (Ormsbee, 2001).

Noell and Witt (1999) have found discrepancies in what teachers say they are implementing and what they actually do. The more ownership a teacher has with the intervention, the more likely it is to work. If an intervention does not fit the personality or teaching style of the teacher, she is likely to implement it poorly, or not at all (Ormsbee, 2001). I see evidence of these inconsistencies because I have the opportunity to work in seven different classrooms. I have witnessed teachers who agree to interventions and then appear not to carry them out. Could it be they have agreed to interventions that they do not really believe in? If this is the case, the outcome is likely to be poor.

What defines an effective outcome? Noell and Witt (1999) suggest that interventions are designed to enhance student performance, and therefore the way to measure success is to look at the student's performance. "Intervention and outcomes are complementary of each other" (Nunn & McMahan, 2000, p. 308). Effective consultation causes teachers to change their behavior as a direct result of the consultation (Noell and Witt). When a student receives

the help he needs (Graden, 1989) and is kept in the least restrictive environment (Graden, et al., 1985) the process is effective. But is it enough to simply reduce special education referrals (Burns, 1999)? Do low referral numbers automatically assume the team is working effectively?

Graden (1989) believes the effectiveness of a collaborative team depends on how it functions: "We need to move away from defining ourselves by our roles in education and focus more on the skills and background we have to offer" (p. 228). Ross (1995, as cited in Burns) further defines an effective team by three criteria: a) administrative support, b) sufficient time and resources, and c) staff commitment. Frequent progress monitoring, data driven decision-making, and parental involvement all contribute to effective problem-solving as well (Nunn & McMahan, 2000).

CHAPTER 4. DATA ANALYSIS

Student Profile

The student case brought to the building assistance team was one in which a fifth grade male was struggling with academics – specifically math. He had already gone through the pre-referral intervention process for similar reasons the year before. The intervention of making up work during recess was mildly effective and so he was referred again. At the problem-solving meetings he was described as being a slow processor, in need of continuous prompting when working, and also a "neat, little guy."

Team Profile

The current team and problem-solving process was put into place last year by the new principal. Prior to this, the building had no building assistance team and teachers did not believe in the problem-solving process. I know this from talking to the current principal and from talking to the special education consultant who worked in the building at the time when no team existed. The team consists of the school psychologist, the school social worker, and a special education teacher. Neither the school psychologist, who leads the meetings, nor the special education teacher have had any specific problem-solving training by the school district.

The principal and special education teacher both expressed the need for general education teachers to become team members and take more ownership in the pre-referral intervention process, but they also both realize that this will take time. The current process and team make-up were described by the principal as being "user-friendly" – a necessity for this building full of teachers who previously refused to participate in, and simply did not believe in, the problem-solving process.

Initial Meeting

The initial meeting took place for thirty minutes before school. The school psychologist, special education teacher, classroom teacher and title math teacher were all present as the meeting began. The school social worker arrived half way through the meeting whereas the title math teacher had to leave early to get to another building. The fact that not all participants could be present for the whole meeting shows that time is a precious and a lacking commodity. The title math teacher, who dominated much of the conversation, was the student's fourth grade classroom teacher and therefore knew the student well.

Define the primary problem

The meeting began quickly and to the point in terms of defining the problem. The classroom teacher began the first sequence by asserting herself or self-selecting her turn to talk. She said that she would like to work on the same problem the student was having the previous year. The sequence continued as the school psychologist oriented herself to the conversation. She self-selected and began to try and clarify the problem by asking, "is that your main concern?" Immediately, as though almost interrupting, the title math teacher self-selected and jumped into the conversation with a quick "no." At this point in the conversation the sequence and rhythm changed as the title math teacher began a lengthy description of the student.

It was obvious the title math teacher knew the student and was familiar with his ability to process math problems. When she described his slow processing, she spoke slowly herself to emphasize the amount of time it takes him to complete work. The school psychologist, who takes on the consultant role at the meetings, continuously inserted "mmhm" sounds throughout the descriptions to show active listening and understanding. Although the title

math teacher guided the direction of the conversation by self-selecting and talking at length, she also provided opportunity for others to talk by bringing her sequences to an end. Her sequences typically ended with several consecutive self-repair statements. For example she said, "he's, you know, he's just, he's just a neat, little guy." Another time she said, "you know, and, I mean he, and you can just, I mean he's thinking all the while." Curiously these instances of self-repair did not arise in the conversation after she said "I cannot see him making it in math without some extreme support in middle school he'll flunk." The self-initiated self-repair statements demonstrate the title math teacher's hesitation to say what she was really thinking at first. It is as though she needed these instances of practice to build up to what she intended to say about his future placement.

The school psychologist gave direction to the meeting and kept participants on task with comments and questions such as "does he eventually get the problem right"; can you talk about where he's at now"; "how can we monitor how he's doing"; and "that would be our goal." She promoted a therapeutic environment by letting the participants vent their frustrations. Although the problem could have been defined more quickly, allowing teachers to share their stories built rapport among the participants. It was obvious the participants felt comfortable around each other from their laughter and ability to understand each other with sequences such as the following reference to an unexpected high test score on a district exam:

Teacher:	Go figure, I have no idea. Maybe he got lucky.
Psychologist:	Well sometimes kids are given a lot of
	[
Special Education Teacher:	Maybe he was identified as a
Teacher:	Yeah
	[

Social Worker:	Yeah
Teacher:	That's true too
	[
Social Worker:	During it
Psychologist:	Ok
Teacher:	Ok, we're good then

This sequence is virtually undecipherable and seemingly fragmented to the layperson, yet there seems to be a high level of accord among the participants. In talking about the student's abilities, the teacher suggested he got lucky with his scores, while the psychologist and special education teacher began to suggest that he might have had accommodations during the testing situation. The idea is never finished verbally because the participants all understand the insinuation of what was about to be said. Clearly the participants understood one another in this sequence.

The psychologist began sequences by self-selecting, but only after everyone had stopped talking. Therefore the turn-taking organization created a forum in which participants could voice their opinions. When she asked about the student's reading skills the classroom teacher's motive for bringing him to the building assistance team was obvious: "he's not low enough." I took this to mean he is not low enough to qualify for special education services in reading. I confirmed this attitude while interviewing the classroom teacher as she explicitly stated she wanted to know if the student qualified for extra help such as resource help. Eventually the student problem was clearly defined and explicitly stated at the initial meeting: He has slow processing with math computation and math reasoning skills.

Analyze the forces impinging on the problem

The step of analyzing the forces impinging on the problem was not explicit at the initial meeting. The title math teacher suggested the idea that a family problem might be affecting

the student's performance, but it came through a lengthy description rather than through an organized sequence. The suggestion was a fleeting comment that was never followed up in any manner. Without sufficient analysis of the problem, one has little hope of effectively brainstorming alternative strategies. Were the step explicit, I would have anticipated guided questions by the psychologist, a clearly defined sequence and either turn-taking organization or adjacency-pair organization.

The first turn-taking organization pursuant to the student's performance was a short sequence initiated by the special education teacher. She spoke for the first time at the meeting by self-selecting as she tried to help clarify the title math teacher's assessment of the student: "he's proceeding through the fifth grade math concepts as he did with fourth grade math concepts, but I doubt he's completely on grade level." This assertion was problematic not only because it provided no tangible data, but also because the participants seemed to have lost the focus of the previously defined problem. It is as though the conversation was broadening rather than narrowing, which is the purpose of analyzing the forces impinging on the problem. The special education teacher therefore asked for clarification by asking if the teacher had "anything...that would show... percentages of how he did." Once the data was provided the scores ranged from 6% to 80% on assignments and tests with an average score of 57%. The scores declined gradually from the beginning of the year which the classroom teacher attributed to the material becoming more difficult. The participants may have been on their way to further analyzing the forces impinging on the problem, but once the scores were cited, the title math teacher self-selected and asserted her opinion of how to proceed.

At the end of the meeting once the intervention had been selected and responsibilities had been determined the psychologist reinitiated a second turn-taking organization to discuss all

the student's academic skills. The sequence did not get to the heart of what forces may be impinging on the student's abilities to do his math work, but it was an effort to better understand the big picture of how the student functions academically overall.

Brainstorm alternative strategies

Strategies were not discussed, but rather the title math teacher simply said:

> Number one his assignments have to be compacted, cut, I mean he has to have smaller assignments so that he can feel successful with what he does complete. And probably start with um, you know, pretty minimal like five problems is all, and I mean perhaps we could have a goal to increase it to ten by the end of the year. I'm not even sure if that's attainable.

This sequence occurred quickly and rhythmically without instances of repair organization. The title math teacher was concise and to the point which are qualities that make for effective communication, however, I wonder what differences might have occurred in the actual problem-solving process had the brainstorming step been included. By asserting herself and guiding the direction of the meeting the title math teacher takes on somewhat of an expert role. She knows the student well, she knows math instruction well, and she is able to convince all participants that her intervention idea is worth trying.

Evaluate and choose a strategy

The intervention was agreed upon as quickly as it was suggested. The pace of the meeting increased at this point and the participants switched to adjacency pair organization. The change in sequences to almost exclusively adjacency pair organization coincided with the early departure of the title math teacher. The psychologist began the sequence with:

Psychologist:	We also talked about shortening his math assignments
Teacher:	Mmhm
Psychologist:	Uh, to five problems?
Teacher:	Yeah, we can do that
Psychologist:	Would that be daily?

Teacher:	Uh, yeah, well twice a week
Pyschologist:	Ok
Teacher:	So put down twice a week

Whether the meeting rhythm changed because the title math teacher left or whether the descriptive narrations would have naturally faded, at this stage in the meeting the participants were task-oriented and information was passed back and forth quickly.

As the team decided that the student would have five problems for his homework assignments the special education teacher continued to clarify. She asked, and it was only her second time speaking at the meeting, "now are we monitoring if he gets them done or are we monitoring if they're correct?" The team decided on five problems because the student works slowly, but it was important to make this clarification because the problem had been defined as the student having difficulty with math computation and math reasoning skills.

The participants seemed satisfied with the idea of monitoring both work completion and accuracy for the intervention. I confirmed this belief with individual interviews because all participants said they thought the intervention was appropriate. They thought the data would tell the team whether or not work completion was the problem or if the grade level content was the problem. I question whether or not the intervention directly coincides with the problem. It did seem that valuable data could be collected through the intervention, but would the problem of math computation and math reasoning skills be directly addressed?

The classroom teacher in particular was speaking quickly and agreeing to suggestions as the team discussed how the intervention would work. She responded in ways such as "let's do that, understanding and all that," "yeah, that's fine," and "let's do that." It felt to me as an observer that she agreed easily to anything and everything because she was simply going through the motions to try and get the student into special education. In fact, at the end of

several fast-paced sequences discussing exactly how to monitor and record the student's work the classroom teacher explicitly asked: "What will it take for him to qualify then if he does not meet that goal?" The classroom teacher's purpose for referring the student was once again evident: She wanted to know if he qualified for special education services.

Specify consultant and consultee responsibilities

Through further adjacency pair organization the psychologist and classroom teacher confirmed the intervention plan and the responsibilities therein. The psychologist was prudent in making sure the intervention and responsibilities were workable for the teacher by asking what would be easiest for her. The teacher was to contact the parent, shorten assignments to five problems and record percentages for work completion and accuracy on a calendar provided by the psychologist. The psychologist would then check back with the classroom teacher after three weeks to see how the intervention was going. Both the classroom teacher and psychologist confirmed and reconfirmed their own responsibilities by quick back and forth comments such as "ok," "right," "yeah I know, ok," and "yeah, try that." In listening to the turn-taking organization and the quick pace of the conversation the responsibilities appeared clear and attainable.

The idea of using a reinforcer came up three times at the initial meeting. The classroom teacher asked if she should keep the student in from recess to help with his work completion. This question might have taken the focus off the defined problem and begun to define a different problem of work completion. The special education teacher and social worker both immediately self-selected and responded to the idea:

Special education teacher:	I don't know how effective that was=
Social worker:	Or how often it was happening either

These comments provide insight into the intervention implementation the previous year. The intervention may not have been carried out with integrity and therefore it may not have been fully effective. Towards the end of the meeting the psychologist asked the classroom teacher if she thought a reinforcer might be helpful. When the classroom teacher responded, "we could try that," the social worker offered do an interest inventory with the student to learn about possible reinforcers for him. Moments later the special education teacher once again self-selected and expressed her opinion: "...If you gave him a reward I don't think that would increase his likelihood of finishing his math problems." This was the second instance of someone saying the idea of a reinforcer would probably not work. Note that the problem discussed pertained exclusively to work completion. I wonder if perhaps the participants lost sight of the idea of math computation and math reasoning skills.

Follow-up Meeting

At the follow-up meeting both the social worker and the title math teacher were absent leaving only the classroom teacher, special education teacher and the school psychologist. The meeting took place eight weeks after the initial meeting which included the two-week winter holiday break. The rhythm of the meeting differed from the initial meeting in that sequences were easy to detect, participants used either turn-taking organization or adjacency pair organization and there were few instances of long narrative descriptions. When I observed the follow-up meeting after the eight weeks I did not notice anything surprising in the content nor in the way the meeting was conducted. It was not until I listened to the meeting tapes one after the other that I discovered major inconsistencies in the process.

The most troubling gap came at virtually the beginning of the follow-up meeting once the data had been reported. The sequence began with the teacher making reference to the student's work:

Teacher:	I don't know it seems like we don't know if he can't do it, or, if he's not trying to do it
Psychologist:	So maybe we need to figure out something that will reinforce him
Teacher:	Ok, that might be good
Psychologist:	What do you guys think?
Teacher:	Yeah I don't know what that would be
Psychologist:	If you think that would be helpful
Teacher:	I think we should do that

It is as though the idea of reinforcement had never been mentioned at the initial meeting when in fact it had been brought to the table three different times. Both the teacher and psychologist's responses suggested they were discussing the idea of reinforcement for the very first time. It was obvious that the social worker did not conduct an interest inventory nor contact the classroom teacher with ideas for reinforcers. I confirmed this information with the social worker and the classroom teacher during follow-up interviews.

Implement the strategy

The classroom teacher had six weeks of class in which to implement the agreed upon intervention. Had she given homework bi-weekly, as discussed for the intervention, the student would have had twelve opportunities to hand in homework. When asked to provide data at the follow-up meeting she began with "I thought I had more than three assignments" and finished with "I can't find my calendar." These comments support my initial belief that the teacher may simply be going through the motions to find out whether or not the student qualifies for special education services. She was ill prepared to provide data as she had only given the student three out of the agreed upon twelve assignments. In a follow-up interview

with one participant I asked her whether or not she thought the classroom teacher had carried out the intervention. Her response was no.

Evaluate the effectiveness, recycle if necessary

Typically, a team should brainstorm new strategies if an intervention has not helped the student to be successful. I expected the team would analyze the reasons the student did not hand in his completed homework. If this were the case the classroom teacher's intervention, or lack thereof, would have been analyzed for improvement or change. Instead, the classroom teacher self-selected and began a sequence with "do we want to, uh, monitor all of his work?" When I heard this comment at the meeting it did not seem out of place, but again, in listening to the tapes I can now see the grave inconsistencies within the problem-solving process.

The problem defined at the initial meeting seemed of no consequence at the follow-up meeting. The teacher's sparse data was provided, the idea of using a reinforcement system was mentioned and then suddenly the sequences skipped ahead to evaluating the student for special education entitlement. It is true that whatever was decided at the follow-up meeting would be the third intervention, but as I previously mentioned, it is doubtful the first two interventions were ever carried out as intended. The focus seemed to stay on work completion but it was troubling to hear the psychologist ask, "what area do you want to focus on?" By asking this question, it suggested a problem needed to be defined as if for an initial meeting. Although it is appropriate to weave in and out of the problem-solving steps and repeat if necessary, it is not appropriate to ignore the problem that has been defined.

The meeting tone

Despite the rush to evaluate the student for special education there does appear to be good communication back and forth between participants. The psychologist uses good strategies to make the process user-friendly. She asks, "what would be the easiest for you to monitor," "what do you guys think," and "do you want me to do that." The special education teacher speaks very little and only to clarify when she does: "I just think that we probably need to rule out that he's not able to do it or he, you know, to find out, is it that he can't do it." When I asked her if her silence is intentional at meetings she told me that her main strategy was to stay on the middle ground and not to take sides. Her frequent silence, she said, must be a result of her efforts to remain neutral.

Without the title math teacher present the classroom teacher was much more vocal and succinct. Her tone sounded to me as though she just wanted to get the end result of knowing whether or not the student "qualified." She spoke in short, quick phrases as if for informational purposes only. She made statements such as, "right," "ok," "good," "sure, yeah," and "I don't care, whatever." The majority of the time she spoke, she was selected by the previous speaker. Her quick terminations and willingness to agree with anything presented indicate her urgency to reach the end of the process and be given some answers. As a researcher of the problem-solving process, I am of course intensely interested in the way the process is carried out. It makes sense that a classroom teacher would not share this interest, and instead want to get directly to the end by knowing whether she will receive extra help with the student or if she is on her own.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The student's staffing had not taken place by the end of the study due to a family member's serious medical problems. Although the final outcome cannot be reported in this study however, in talking to the team participants, it sounded as though the student would qualify for some type of special education support with either work completion or math. Although the student case should have been brought to a close at least a month prior to the completion of this study I am still able to discuss the team problem-solving process and its effectiveness.

Personal Interaction Skills

The participants interacted with ease, and because "consultation is primarily an interpersonal exchange..." (Gutkin, 1996, p. 338), it was important that the participants feel comfortable with one another. The pre and post-meeting talk was personal and friendly with questions such as "where did you get those shoes?" Participants appeared to be able to say what was on their mind and all comments were treated respectfully. When comments began to stray from the topic, participants were redirected by the psychologist and the special education teacher. Although the participant roles were not explicitly stated in my presence, based on observation, all participants seemed to understand and allow the school psychologist to facilitate the meeting.

Kampwirth (1999) defines an active listener as someone who "reflects back on the speaker's words in such a way that the speaker knows that her words have been accurately heard...(p.90). I observed active listening by the eye contact, reiteration and clarification of statements made, and the interjected words such as "ok" and "mhmm." Not only did the words give me the impression that participants felt comfortable, but so did their laughter.

There were moments when all participants laughed simultaneously. In follow-up interviews when I asked participants why they laughed, each participant told me she thought it was because they could relate to one another or that they were all in agreement. The laughter came when certain student attributes were discussed. It was as though the participants could feel for one another and understood the situation before them. There were also moments of teasing one another in a friendly professional manner. As an observer it appeared that all participants genuinely cared about the student and were interested in helping him succeed. The personal interaction skills of this team are its greatest strength.

Problem-solving Process

When I asked the principal if she thought the teachers in her school saw the problem-solving process as a hoop to jump through, she answered, "yes" without hesitation. The special education teacher shared this same perception during her interview. I asked this question specifically because of my frustration with my own team and wanted to know if this phenomenon occurs elsewhere. The professional literature explicitly tells us that building assistance teams are not intended to be special education referral committees (Hayek, 1987). Understanding this concept and actually putting it into practice are two different realities.

The team I observed failed to show any evidence of a problem-solving process. Although the team began by defining the problem, the participants quickly lost sight of the definition and put it aside. I saw no evidence of analysis of forces impinging on the problem, brainstorming, or strategy selection. Participant responsibilities were discussed at the meetings, but with little follow-through, I consider this step to be missing as well. The intervention was not implemented with consistency and therefore no objective data was available to the team at the follow-up meeting. This lack of data was the most troubling

aspect I observed because it is the data that helps a team make informed decisions. Also, without a concrete structure or process to follow, the likelihood of the team affecting change is minimal.

Team Efficacy

An effective team is defined in the literature by many variables. There is no *one* definition for what makes an effective team. It may be the systematic nature in which the process is approached, the low student referrals to special education, the student performance, or the changing of teacher behaviors. The special education teacher jokingly said she thought the definition of an effective team was keeping everyone happy. Although she said it in jest, I saw both the school psychologist and special education teacher make an effort to keep participants happy - an asset that promotes communication and open-minded attitudes towards new ideas and suggestions.

Whether this team's efficacy is measured by a systematic process, referrals to special education, student performance, or the changing of teacher behaviors, it clearly fails in each of these areas. The meetings resembled more of a forum for venting frustrations rather than a structured problem-solving environment. Were a structured process in place, the chances of improving efficacy would be greater. The student did not change his performance and will most likely be referred to special education. Further, the teacher's behavior did not change. The outcome of the meetings yielded nothing. The process did not affect change in anyone involved, and the team knew no more about the student after the two meetings than when it started. Was the team effective? No. The only reason the team will recommend special education support services for the student is because the school psychologist assessed the

student. Regretfully, this could have been done without the meetings and saved the participants their precious time.

Accepting Imperfection

Before I conducted this study I had my own ideas about what an effective team would look like. I read the professional literature and imagined a fine-tuned team of teachers working collaboratively, supporting one another and keeping to a schedule. I envisioned a team that explicitly completed all seven steps of the problem-solving process, communicated well, acted responsibly, and helped students feel successful. This ideal that I have gleaned from many sources might work if I were working solo, but real life stressors and working collaboratively changes everything. This study has taught me that a therapeutic, nurturing environment and good rapport with colleagues must be in place before the problem-solving process can even begin. The principal's idea of a "user-friendly" team may in fact be a priority in creating an effective team. I will participate in processes that are missing steps and could be carried out more effectively, but the question now becomes – how will I deal with this imperfection?

Part of accepting the imperfection will mean that I need to keep the integrity of the process in mind, but not over-analyze whether or not the team is using it to perfection. If I focus too intensely on whether or not the team is using the process correctly, I may loose sight of the actual student problem and the efforts being made to help the student experience success. "Consultants who focus entirely on the content of presenting problems and potential solutions while ignoring relationship issues with their consultees are likely to fail more often than not" (Gutkin, 1996, p. 337). In watching and listening to the school psychologist I have learned that participants need to express all their thoughts regarding the student cases. By

worrying about which step of the problem-solving process the comments fit in to, I may not actually hear what the participants are saying.

The biggest challenge for me in accepting imperfection will be accepting the actions of others. It will be important for me to focus on the integrity of my actions and efforts to use the process effectively while restraining from over-reacting if other participants don't act as I would. I can still have an impact on the process by helping the team use a structured process that promotes change in student and teacher behaviors as well as producing objective data for decision making. Realizing I can't control the implementation of the intervention will be the hardest part of accepting imperfection. I must anticipate that many interventions will not be carried out as originally discussed at the problem-solving meeting. Knowing this ahead of time will help me relax and appreciate the hard work that has been accomplished.

Suggestions for the Team

The building assistance team acted with good intentions, maintained consistent parent contact, defined a problem, and communicated comfortably. The actual problem-solving process was difficult to discern and there were some gaps with the follow-through of responsibilities. Knowing that the team is still developing and establishing itself as a permanent fixture in the school, and that time is a precious commodity, my suggestion for immediate implementation would be to simply make the process more explicit to all participants.

An explicit process may be as simple as having visual supports in front of all participants so they can anticipate each step as they work through the problem-solving process. It may also be helpful for one person to record, at the very least, the problem defined, the intervention strategy, and the list of responsibilities on large chart paper. That way when the

team reconvenes for follow-up meetings it can refer back to the prior decisions, and participants can self-monitor whether or not they have carried through with the plan. These suggestions would be simple to put into place immediately while maintaining a user-friendly process.

My suggestions for the team on a more long-term basis include training together as a team, following a structured process without fail, consistently implementing interventions, monitoring implementation of interventions, collecting objective data, and making decisions based on the data. By receiving training as a team the participants would be more likely to understand and share priorities as well as use a systematic process. Intervention implementation is the essence of problem-solving process because outcome and change are ultimately what define efficacy. Once all team members share priorities and understand the importance of a structured process, they can then support and monitor classroom teachers' interventions. If these elements listed above can be accomplished, accurate data can be obtained for informed decision-making and effective problem-solving.

Future Directions

As I think about my role on a building assistance team it is a bit overwhelming. In theory, I know how the process should work and how members should contribute. I also know the reality that comes with being a teacher. People are short on time, have lives outside the work place, and have a classroom full of students to worry about. Given the theory, the reality, and my newly gained knowledge from this study I must now determine how I will contribute as a member of my own building assistance team.

First and foremost I will strive to create the type of therapeutic environment I observed with this study. Whether or not that is the theorized intent of a problem-solving team, the

reality is: Teachers need to vent their frustrations and feel heard before progress can be made. In creating good rapport and an environment in which people feel at ease, I see myself paying special attention to the classroom teacher's reaction to the proposed interventions. If the teacher is not comfortable with or dedicated to the chosen intervention, the process is sure to fail.

Second, I see my role as being that of an educator. I have no control over preconceived notions as to the purpose of a building assistance team. I am certain I will always encounter teachers who see the problem-solving process as a gateway to special education services. What I *can* do is slowly, gradually, and repeatedly convey the idea that the problem-solving process is a preventative process rather than a referral process. By making the process visually explicit and recording the decisions made, I can encourage my team to try and remain faithful to the problem-solving process. I can also encourage accountability by recording what decisions were made and how the responsibilities were distributed.

Finally, I will help create an approach for my team to involve parents further. The school I observed created its own documents for communicating with parents from the initial referral to the implemented interventions. My team currently has no protocol for communicating with parents and I see this as a real weakness. In fact, it almost seems unethical to refer a student to the building assistance team without the parents knowing a problem exists. If we continue on the same path of having so little contact with parents, we are setting ourselves up for failure.

It will be important for me to continue to read the professional literature on the problem-solving process to remind myself of the ideal model. My struggle will come in applying my knowledge to the reality of my work environment. But, by remaining focused on nurturing

the participants, gently holding them accountable, and accepting the imperfection of my team I am sure to help it become a more effective team.

APPENDIX A. CONSENT FORM

A qualitative study of how one building assistance team solves problems

Dear Parent / Teacher,

My name is Sarah Kelly and I am a special education teacher in the Des Moines school district. I am also a masters student at Iowa State University. As part of my graduate program I am required to complete a thesis. You are invited to participate in a research project for my thesis that studies how one Building Assistance Team problem-solves.

I will observe one Building Assistance Team in one elementary school as it problem-solves one student case (about 2-3 sessions or 1.5 hours). After observing the team in action I will conduct follow-up interviews with several of the team members (about 30 minutes each). All observations and interviews will be audio recorded so that I can later study the conversations by using conversation analysis.

This research may be beneficial to the Building Assistance Team members in helping them understand how they work as a team to problem-solve. The only projected discomfort for the team members would be dependent on each person's level of comfort in being observed during meetings. There are no foreseeable risks for the identified student or his parents, despite the student being the topic of conversation at the problem solving meetings, because my research will focus on the adults and how they go about solving problems as a team.

Your participation is confidential and this confidentiality will be maintained through: storage of data and notes in a secure location accessible only to the researcher; use of personal and organizational pseudonyms in written and oral presentations of this research; and removal of personally identifiable information from field notes, transcripts, and research reports submitted to the instructor. An abstract of my findings will be given to the Des Moines Public Schools program evaluator for testing and research.

Your participation in the study is voluntary, and you may decline to participate without any penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and the data pertaining to your participation will be destroyed or returned to you.

If at any time you have questions about this research or your participation, you may contact me (Sarah Kelly, 1305 Roosevelt Ave., Ames, IA, 50010; (515) 232-0588; sarah.Kelly@dmps.k12.ia.us). You may also contact my major advisor Dr. Geoffrey Ableson (N132 Lagomarcino Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, IA, 50010; (515) 294-7283; geoff@iastate.edu).

I consent to participate in the research study named and described above:

Name: (printed) _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) What is your role in the building?
2) How did you become a member of the building assistance team?
3) How long have you been a member of the building assistance team?
4) Have you had training as a building assistance team member?
5) How often are parents involved in the process?
6) What role do parents typically play in the process?
7) What do you think of the problem-solving process?
8) What do you think the purpose of the building assistance team is?
9) Describe problem-solving in your own words.
10) Do you think classroom teachers in your building find the team helpful?
11) How do you know if the building assistance team is being effective?
12) Does your team self-evaluate?
13) How do you think the meeting went? What worked? What didn't work?
14) Is there anything you wanted to say at the meeting that you didn't?
15) How do you think your team members work together?
16) Who decides what the intervention should be?
17) Where are the interventions carried out?
18) Is there anyone monitoring the interventions to ensure accountability?
19) What type of support is available for the teacher carrying out the intervention?
20) Do you think the chosen intervention is appropriate?
21) Do you think the problem-solving process helps reduce teacher frustration?
22) Do you feel you have adequate resources to effectively help students?
23) What kind of administrative support is available?
24) How did the team arrive at the process it is currently using?

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