FORMATIVE RESEARCH ON THE INITIAL STAGE OF THE SYSTEMIC CHANGE PROCESS IN A SMALL URBAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

Roberto Joseph
Purdue University

Charles M. Reigeluth
Indiana University

Roberto Joseph is an Assistant Professor at Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN in the Educational Technology Program, School of Education. Email: rjoseph@purdue.edu Phone: 765-496-2190 Fax: 765-496-1622

Charles M. Reigeluth is a Professor at Indiana University, Bloomington, IN in the Instructional Systems Technology Department, School of Education. Email: reigelut@indiana.edu Phone: 812-856-8464 Fax: 812-856-8239
Abstract

This study utilized a qualitative research methodology known as formative research (Reigeluth & Frick, 1999) in order to improve upon the process guidelines that are described in the Guidance System for Transforming Education (GSTE). This study took place in the context of a small (student population 5,447), partly urban and partly rural school district in Indiana. The researchers, also serving as change facilitators, investigated the early stages of the systemic change process as outlined in the GSTE. Specifically, the research focused on field-testing and improving the following three Events: Event 1: Assess and enhance facilitator readiness, Event 2: establish a relationship with a school district, and Event 3: assess the district’s readiness for change and negotiate a formal agreement. It was found that Event 1 could have been improved if the facilitators had access to a computer based self assessment system. Event 2 could have been improved if the facilitators had more guidance in helping them identify school districts with which to work. Event 3 could have been improved if the facilitators had more guidance to help them develop the interview protocols.

Keywords: Systemic Change, Educational Change, School District Change, Formative Research, Transforming Education, Case Study
History teaches us that we have been reactionary to urgent calls for the improvement of our nation’s public schools. In the past century, our nation’s educational system has adapted to meet the needs of its evolving local communities and global society. We have answered these urgent calls and have adapted, using a piecemeal approach, by patching up the parts of the school system that need improvement most. As a result, currently our public educational system is failing to meet the needs of an information age society (Banathy, 1991; Caine & Caine, 1997; Jenlink, 1995; Reigeluth & Garfinkle, 1994), and therefore is in need of a fundamental, systemic change (Banathy, 1991, 1992; Duffy, Rogerson, & Blick, 2000; Jenlink, 1995; Reigeluth & Garfinkle, 1994; Schlechty, 1990).

What is Systemic Change and Why is it Needed?

When trying to understand the concept of systemic change, it is helpful to compare it to piecemeal change (Banathy, 1991; Reigeluth & Garfinkle, 1994). Duffy, Rogerson and Blick (2000) use a jigsaw puzzle metaphor to help us understand why using a piecemeal approach to change does not work and why systemic change in education is needed. They say that like a successfully completed jigsaw puzzle, every piece is connected to everything else. You can’t change one piece without altering the pieces connected to it. Incremental reforms tend to focus on individual pieces of the school system without considering the required changes in the connecting pieces. (p. 49)

Piecemeal change uses a patching-up approach, and focuses on a small piece of the puzzle in improving the part(s) of the school system that need(s) fixing. There are many school change models which utilize this piecemeal approach to change (e.g., Coalition of Essential Schools, Success for All, and School Development Program). Advocates of systemic change view school
restructuring as a form of piecemeal change, since restructuring tends to focus on the school or curricular level. Most school change is inherently not systemic because it focuses on the school or a part of the school as the unit of change. True systemic change, requires substantial changes in all aspects of the educational system (i.e., government policy, board of education, district, schools, classroom practices, curriculum, assessment, etc.) (Reigeluth, 1994).

In the corporate sector, the term that is used that is synonymous with systemic change is reengineering. Hammer and Champy (2001) define “reengineering” as “the fundamental rethinking and radical redesign of business processes to achieve dramatic improvements in critical, contemporary measures of performance, such as cost, quality, service, and speed” (p. 35). For systemic change in education to be successful in dramatically improving student learning, it will require a fundamental rethinking or mindset shift in the way learning is structured for children; and it will require a radical redesign of the entire educational system and its processes. Duffy et al. (2000) say that

In the literature on school improvement, there are many reasons why schools need to be improved. In the same literature, there are many authors telling you what the outcomes of school improvement should be. Some of these models aim to improve individual school buildings, while others attempt to improve the curricula. Very few of them however, talk about how to redesign entire school systems for high performance. Most of what is described in the literature represents incremental, piecemeal change. (p. xvi)

One purpose of this article is to review those few change models that do address how to redesign entire school systems. A second purpose of this article is to present the findings of a research study conducted in a school district in Indianapolis, Indiana. But before we review
these, it is important to understand what a process (or “how to”) orientation is, and why it is important.

**What is a process orientation and why is it important?**

It is important to distinguish between the product and process of change. The product of the change process is the redesigned educational system, which in turn has its products, such as student learning, attendance, teacher satisfaction, parent involvement, etc. (Reigeluth, 2002). School change models that are product oriented focus on what the new educational system should look like. For example the principles below that are outlined in the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) describe what schools should look like, yet they offer no process guidance to help educators implement each of the principles.

The CES Principles are (Sizer, 2002):

1. The focus should be on students learning to use their minds well
2. A school’s goals should be simple—less is more
3. A school’s goals should apply to all students
4. Maximize personalized learning
5. Student as worker, teacher as coach
6. Document with authentic assessment
7. Value expectations, trust and decency, include parental involvement
8. Principal and teachers as generalists first, specialists second
9. Administrative planning with lower student to teacher ratios
10. Honor diversity
There are many additional examples found in the literature of change models that are product-focused – that describe what schools should look like. In 1992 when President Bush Sr. called for “break the mold schools,” the **New American Schools Development Corporation** (NAS) responded by funding educational researchers who were developing change models (Stringfield, Ross, & Smith, 1996). To date, the NAS models have not created a fundamental change in the educational system. At the 2002 conference of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), researchers presented findings on the NAS models that revealed significant implementation problems and failures. These findings provide growing evidence that we need a better understanding of the *process* of transforming schools and districts, and that no matter how good a design is, it will not succeed in its implementation if a sound transformation process is not used.

Systemic change in education must, therefore, emphasize a process orientation (i.e., how to redesign entire school systems). Argyris (1954) defines process as “… any course or sequence of behavior accomplishing a purpose” (p. 9). Hammer and Champy (2001) define “process as a collection of activities that takes one or more kinds of input and creates an output that is of value to the customer” (p. 38). French (1973) defines process as “a flow of interrelated events moving toward some goal, purpose, or end” (p.426). These definitions are consistent with our use of the term “process” in this article.

The systemic change process has many elements that are all interrelated to form a coherent system that helps educational stakeholders to develop innovative methods for designing a new educational system. The process must also help school districts to develop the readiness and capacity to engage in, and take ownership of, a large-scale systemic change effort. Most importantly, the process of systemic change must recognize the importance of helping people to
evolve their mindsets or mental models (Senge, 1990) about education. The process is realistic, and it helps people to understand that we have been enculturated to view schools in a certain way, and until we can evolve our mental models of what we believe are “real schools,” we will not achieve fundamental changes in education (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). In our experience in working with schools, we have come to believe that helping stakeholders to evolve their mindsets or mental models about education is perhaps the most important aspect of a systemic change process.

Educators and researchers are now calling for the development of a process (specific steps and guidance) for systemic change that a school community can use to transform their educational system (Banathy, 1991; Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996; Duffy et al., 2000; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Jenlink, Reigeluth, Carr, & Nelson, 1998, unpublished manuscript; Reigeluth & Garfinkle, 1994). As emphasized above, much of the school change literature has focused on the product and not on the process of change. The educational change literature is severely lacking research on the process of systemic change in education.

In an effort to address this gap in the literature, several researchers have developed design theories (flexible processes) for systemic change in education (Banathy, 1991; Comer et al., 1996; Duffy et al., 2000; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Jenlink et al., 1998; Reigeluth & Garfinkle, 1994). Following the release of “A Nation at Risk” (1983), those and other researchers have been developing design theories to help our society transform its public educational systems. While helpful, many of these theories have not provided practitioners with the level of guidance and support needed to sustain a long-term systemic change effort. Additionally, many of these theories have focused on the individual school as the unit of change, as opposed to focusing on the district and community levels. However, two of these design
theories do offer a significant amount of detailed process guidance, the “Knowledge Work Supervision (KWS)” (Duffy et al., 2000) and the “Guidance System for Transforming Education (GSTE)” (Jenlink, Reigeluth, Carr, & Nelson, 1996; Jenlink et al., 1998, unpublished manuscript), and show some promise to help stakeholders transform their educational systems. They are the most detailed design theories for district-wide systemic change that we have found to date.

In the next section the authors present a brief description of both process models (KWS and GSTE), to provide the reader with deeper insights into the systemic change process. This is followed by a description of the formative research methodology used in this study to examine and improve the GSTE in the context of its use in a school district. The results of the study are then presented, along with recommendations for improving the GSTE.

Knowledge Work Supervision

According to Duffy et al. (2000), KWS “is a new strategic, comprehensive, systemic and systematic approach that can transform school systems in fundamental ways” (p. 4). KWS views the school district as the unit of change. There are four major phases in the KWS process:

Phase 1: Building Support for Innovation
Phase 2: Redesigning for High Performance
Phase 3: Achieving Stability and Diffusion
Phase 4: Sustaining School Improvement

Within each phase there is a series of steps or activities that are recommended to be performed to achieve the goals and purposes of the phase (see Table 1 for a list of the steps outlined in Phase...
1), as well as principles that guide those steps or activities. These steps and principles provide detailed guidance for each phase of the KWS systemic change process.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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In addition to the phases, there are five key players for KWS, without whom the process will likely fail:

1. Strategic Leadership Team
2. Knowledge Work Coordinator
3. Cluster Improvement Teams
4. Site Improvement Teams
5. Communities of Practice

The roles of each key player are described in detail by Duffy et al.

**The Guidance System for Transforming Education**

The (GSTE) (Jenlink et al., 1998, unpublished manuscript) is another process model for facilitating systemic change. The GSTE was designed to provide process guidelines to a facilitator engaging in a district-wide systemic change effort. Like the KWS, the GSTE does not provide any indication of what needs to be changed in the district. Rather, it provides the facilitator with guidance about the process that the school district and its community should engage in for systemic change to occur successfully.

The GSTE is comprised of “discrete events” (see Table 2), which are a chronological series of activities for engaging in systemic change, and “continuous events,” which are activities
that must be addressed continuously throughout much or all of the change process (Jenlink et al., 1998). The discrete events fall into five phases:

I. Assess Readiness and Negotiate an Agreement

II. Prepare the Core Team for the Change Process

III. Prepare Expanded Teams for the Process

IV. Engage in Design of a New Educational System

V. Implement and Evolve the New System

These phases are described in greater detail below.

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Insert Table 2 about here
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Furthermore, there is a clearly identified set of values upon which the GSTE is based: caring for children and their future, systemic thinking, inclusivity, stakeholder ownership, co-evolution, facilitator, process orientation, context, time, space, participant commitment, respect, responsibility, readiness, collaboration, community, vision, wholeness, language, conversation,
democracy, and culture. Particularly important to the success of the change effort is the role of a neutral facilitator who has experience in district-wide systemic change.

The discrete events for the systemic change process fall into the following five phases.

**Phase I. Assess Readiness and Negotiate an Agreement**

During this phase, the facilitator assesses his or her level of readiness to guide a systemic change effort in a school district. It is during this phase that the facilitator begins to establish a relationship with a school district, and determines whether the district is at a sufficient level of readiness for a systemic change effort. If both the school district and the facilitator are at a sufficient level of readiness and are committed to working with one another, then they should negotiate a formal agreement. This agreement stipulates expectations for all stakeholders involved, including the role of the facilitator.

**Phase II. Prepare a Core Team for the Change Process**

Once a formal agreement has been signed, the facilitator should guide the school district in forming a "Core Team" to initiate the change process. The members of the Core Team should be well respected opinion leaders of their respective stakeholder groups. The Core Team should be small, preferably one leader from each of the major stakeholder groups (e.g., the superintendent, a board member, a parent leader, and the teachers’ association president). The primary role of the Core Team is to evaluate the capacity for change in their school district, develop an understanding of the nature of systemic change, and develop a culture for change on their team, in preparation for creating expanded teams in which that culture and understanding will be cultivated.
Phase III. Prepare Expanded Teams for the Process

During this phase the Core Team expands into two teams. One team is for political support. It should be large (about 25 people), and should be comprised of highly respected representatives (opinion leaders) of the various stakeholder groups. This team is called the Decisioning Team, for it is entrusted with making the decisions about the changes; and this is the team that the Core Team usually expands into first. The Decisioning Team then forms a Design Team, which is responsible for creating a shared vision of the “new” system and working out details to ensure its success. It should be small (about 7 – 10 people), and should be comprised of well respected creative thinkers from a wide variety of stakeholder groups. This team has some overlap in membership with the Decisioning Team. In this phase the Core Team’s culture for, and understanding of, systemic change are cultivated within these expanded teams.

Phase IV. Engage in Design of a New Educational System

This phase is probably the most intensive of all the phases, because it requires all those involved to share their beliefs about education. Here stakeholders must come together to envision their ideal educational system. It is expected that various stakeholder groups will have very different ideal visions, as will different stakeholders within each group. What is more important is the foundational set of common beliefs about education that must be developed and agreed upon by all stakeholders. It is from this set of common beliefs that ideal visions of education can be created to design a new educational system. Often, multiple design teams are formed so that the common beliefs can be implemented in very different ways in different schools in the district.

Phase V. Implement and Evolve the New System

Once the ideal system has been generated and approved, the community develops an implementation process for gradually evolving the current system ever closer to the ideal. Some
compromises on the ideal are usually required, especially in the short term, and of course the ideal will change as they get closer to it. This means that they need not only a plan for evolving the current system toward the ideal, but also a plan for evolving the ideal. Evaluation is an integral part of both of these processes.

Detailed guidance for performing each phase is provided by Jenlink et al. (Jenlink et al., unpublished manuscript).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to test and improve the process guidelines that are described in the GSTE (Jenlink et al., unpublished manuscript). Since the GSTE was designed to be carried out over a 3-5 year period, the scope of this study was limited to three discrete events that comprise Phase I (Assess Readiness and Negotiate an Agreement). Specifically, the three events that were studied are:

**Event 1. Assess and Enhance Facilitator Readiness**

The event offers the facilitator(s) guidance in determining his or her level of readiness and capability to be a process facilitator of a systemic change process.

**Event 2. Establish a Relationship with a School District**

The event offers guidance on how to identify a school district to work with, and how to establish good rapport with an initial contact person and superintendent.

**Event 3. Assess the District’s Readiness for Change and Negotiate an Agreement**

The event offers guidance on helping the facilitator(s) and the school district to assess, and determine whether or not they should work together.
Research Questions

The following research questions served as a guide for the study:

1. What guidelines of phase I worked well in this particular district-wide effort?

2. What guidelines did not work well in this effort, and should they have been omitted or revised for this effort? If they were or should have been revised, what revisions worked well, or would likely have worked well, in this effort?

3. What new activities should have been used in this effort?

4. What criteria were most helpful in judging what “worked well” in this change effort?

5. Given the changes that improved or would likely have improved the process used in this effort, which ones might be beneficial to incorporate into the GSTE? And what “situationalities” (contextual aspects of a particular case, see Reigeluth, 1999) may influence when any guidelines should and should not be used or what the guidelines should be like?

Formative Research Methodology

The purpose and focus of this study was to further develop the GSTE, a guidance system for facilitating systemic change in public school districts. To improve the guidance available to school systems interested in systemic change, developmental research is needed. In this research study, formative research was utilized as a form of developmental research or action research in order to recommend improvements for the GSTE. The formative research methodology (Reigeluth & Frick, 1999) is a kind of “design experiment” (Greeno, Collins, & Resnick, 1996), but is intended to identify potential improvements for a design theory (or guidance system) by finding ways to improve a case that is conducted according to that design theory. Reigeluth and
Frick (1999) “have drawn from formative evaluation and case study research methodologies in the development of formative research methods” (p. 634).

According to Reigeluth and Frick (1999), the methodology to conduct this kind of formative research requires the following six steps:

1. **Select a design theory.**

   Reigeluth and Frick (1999) explain that in selecting a design theory it is important to choose one that “you want to improve” (p. 639). For this case study, the researcher selected the Jenlink et al. (1998; unpublished manuscript) GSTE, which was designed to offer guidance to facilitators working with school districts. It is a design theory that is intended to provide educators with detailed guidance on “how to” transform public school districts. The purposes of selecting the GSTE for this study were to field test and improve the guidance it offered.

2. **Design an instance of the theory.**

   In December 2000, the Indiana Urban Schools Association announced to all its members that Indiana University was interested in facilitating a district-wide systemic change effort. Four superintendents contacted the co-facilitators with expressions of interest. After phone interviews with the superintendents, one district emerged as having a higher level of readiness for systemic change than the others and being more conveniently located. On-site interviews with the superintendent, administrators, parent leaders, principals, teachers’ association, and school board revealed a strong interest by all in the co-facilitators facilitating a systemic change effort in their school system.

   The district was small, partly urban and partly rural, consisting of one administrative building, one high school, one middle school, four elementary schools, and one early childhood center, within an area of 32 square miles. At the time of this study, the school district had a total
population of 5,447 students, 260 teachers, and 283 professional staff. It had a student-to-teacher ratio of 19:1 and approximately 30 percent of its student population was eligible for free lunch.

In this study, the co-facilitators applied the guidance provided by the three events of Phase I to the school district’s change process. In general, the co-facilitators used a three-step process for implementing the three events of the GSTE within the school district:

1. Present the district with the GSTE’s advice for conducting each event (i.e., meet with district personnel to plan each event, and provide the district personnel with hard copies of the event for their review).
2. Guide the district in redesigning the entire event or parts of the event to suit the needs of their district, as called for by the GSTE.
3. Support the district personnel in the process of implementing the redesigned event.

The focus of this research was on finding ways of improving each of the three events as performed in this case and suggesting possible improvements for the GSTE. As each event was implemented, it was important to collect and analyze formative data. This process is discussed next.

3. Collect and analyze formative data on the instance.

Throughout the performance of events 1, 2, and 3 of the GSTE, the researchers conducted formative evaluation (Bloom, Hastings, & Madaus, 1971; Cronbach, 1963; Thiagarajan, Semmel, & Semmel, 1974) of the Decatur change process, with the expectation that the data would help improve the GSTE. When collecting formative data, Reigeluth and Frick (1999) recommend conducting interviews and observations, and reviewing documents. The data were collected and analyzed from multiple sources that included: the researchers as participant
observers, field notes of all visits, focus-group interviews, individual interviews with the stakeholders of the school district, and surveys. Additionally, important documents about the district were collected and analyzed (i.e., mission statements, goals, and demographic data). The purpose of the data analysis was to identify strengths, weaknesses, and possible improvements in phase I of the GSTE as implemented in this case.

4. Revise the instance.

The researchers and the Core Team made constant revisions to the district’s change process throughout the entire study. Revisions to the instance (application of the event in this case) were made before and after the implementation of each event. It is important to note that revisions made before the implementation of each event were not based on formative data; rather they were the result of redesign efforts by the Core Team to tailor the events to their context as called for by the GSTE. Revisions made after the implementation of each event were based on formative data. All revisions were based on the data collected from the sources described above in step 3 of the study’s methodology. The researchers, as often as possible, tried out the revisions.

5. Repeat the data collection and revision cycle.

As much as possible, the researchers repeated the process of data collection, analysis and revision that is described above for each event. In this way the researchers found that some events or activities worked well in certain situations or conditions, but may not have worked well in others. According to Reigeluth and Frick (1999), these “situationalities are important discoveries in a research effort to improve a design theory and better meet the needs of the practitioners” (p. 644).
6. **Offer tentative revisions for the theory.**

Throughout the study the findings were constantly used to hypothesize revisions for the GSTE. Of course additional case studies field testing these three events of the GSTE should be conducted in similar and not so similar contexts in order to replicate and validate the generalizability of the findings (Reigeluth & Frick, 1999). In those studies where the context is very different from that of the school district in this study, the researcher expects to find “situationalities” (Reigeluth, 1999) in the guidelines, indicating that some guidelines that worked well in one community may not work well in another. In those cases where the context is very similar to that of the district in this study, the researcher still expects to find some situationalities. Identifying situationalities will be important for facilitators working in different kinds of public school districts throughout our nation.

**Methodological Issues**

Qualitative research has been criticized for not being rigorous and lacking validity and reliability. Reigeluth and Frick (1999) address three methodological issues for formative research: “(a) construct validity, (b) sound data collection and analysis procedures, and (c) attention to generalizability to the theory” (p. 647).

**Construct Validity**

Construct validity is defined as “establishing correct operational measures for the concepts being studied” (Yin, 1984). In this formative research study the concepts of interest are: 1) the methods offered by the GSTE, 2) the situations that influence the use of the GSTE, and 3) the indicators of strengths and weaknesses of the GSTE (Reigeluth & Frick, 1999).

According to Reigeluth and Frick (1999), “there are two ways in which construct validity can be weakened: omission (not faithfully including an element of the theory [GSTE]) and
commission (including an element that is not called for by the theory [GSTE])” (p. 647). In this research study, every effort was made to address the issues of omission and commission of elements (methods, events, activities) in the design theory (GSTE).

Yin (1984) recommends three methods that increase construct validity.

1. Use multiple sources of evidence. Many researchers refer to this as *triangulation* during data collection. As mentioned earlier, in this study the data were collected and analyzed from multiple sources that included: researcher as participant observer, field notes of all visits, focus-group interviews, individual interviews with the stakeholders of the school district, and surveys.

2. Establish a *chain of evidence* during data collection. Miles and Huberman (1984) recommend using contact summary sheets in addition to field notes after every visit with the school district. They recommend including the following information on the contact sheets: people, events or situations that were involved; the main themes or issues in the contact; the research questions that the contact most closely addressed; new hypotheses, speculations or guesses about the field situations; where the fieldworker should place most energy during the next contact, and what sorts of information should be sought. In this study a table was developed which included much of the contact information that Miles and Huberman (1984) recommend should be gathered after each visit to the school district.

3. Have the draft case study report reviewed by key informants. This is a form of *member checking*. As each event in this study was implemented in the school district, the researcher shared drafts of the report with the school district describing “what happened” (and how what happened differed from the guidance offered by the GSTE) as the event was conducted, and
“what did and did not work well,” and included “tentative recommendations for improving” the GSTE.

**Sound Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

The methods used to increase construct validity (Yin, 1984) can also be used to increase “the credibility or accuracy of the data” (Reigeluth & Frick, 1999, p. 647). There are various ways of increasing credibility in a formative research study: triangulation, chain of evidence, member checks, researcher’s role, assumptions, biases, and theoretical orientation (Reigeluth & Frick, 1999, p. 648).

In addition to “credibility or accuracy of the data,” Reigeluth and Frick (1999) suggest that “the soundness of the data collection and analysis procedures” is also influenced by the “thoroughness or the completeness of the data” (p. 647). Reigeluth and Frick (1999) outline various ways of ensuring and enhancing thoroughness of the data: advance preparation of participants, an emergent data-collection process, gradually decreasing obtrusivity, iteration until saturation, and identification of strengths as well as weaknesses. In this study every effort was made to address each of the methods described above for increasing accuracy of the data, and ensuring the soundness of the data collection and analysis procedures.

**Attention to Generalizability to the Theory**

According to Reigeluth and Frick (1999), “rigor in formative research is increased by enhancing ways that the results can be generalized to the theory” (p. 649). They suggest two issues to pay attention to for generalizing results to the theory: situationality and replication.

**Situationality** - The researchers probed to identify possible “situationalities” that may have restricted the generalizability of the school district’s Phase I process to other cases. Situationalities are the ways that events, activities, and methods may vary for different
contextual situations. In this study the researcher provided enough *rich, thick description* “so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence whether the findings can be transferred” (Merriam, 1998 p. 211). Additionally, the researcher hypothesized situationalities and incorporated them into the theory. Reigeluth and Frick (1999) state that “when situationalities are incorporated into the theory, the theory becomes more useful for a broader range of situations” (p. 649).

*Replication* – Before actual changes to theory can be made, additional developmental research studies will be needed to support or qualify the findings. Also, additional research studies should be conducted in various contexts (i.e., small, medium and large rural, urban and suburban school districts) in order to identify additional situationalities that can be incorporated into the theory, and to develop guidelines for each.

**Results**

*Event 1 Assess and Enhance Facilitator Readiness*

This section provides first, a summary of *what happened* as Event 1 was conducted, and identifies ways in which “what happened” differs from the guidance offered by the GSTE and why. This includes identifying operational details that were not spelled out in the GSTE. Second, evidence is shared about *what did and did not work well* while conducting Event 1. Lastly, the researchers offer a summary of tentative recommendations for *improving the GSTE*. With the exception of Event 1, which was conducted prior to making initial contacts with school districts, most of the data in this study were collected through focus group interviews with various stakeholders in the school district. The stakeholders were instrumental in helping the
researcher to identify the strengths, weaknesses, and possible improvements of the GSTE for this specific case.

What Happened?

In this case the facilitators read through the entire event to determine the areas in which they needed most development. The facilitators possessed much of the content knowledge that Event 1 recommended the facilitators to know. For example, Event 1 advises that the facilitator:

Review Unit I, including "Logic of the Change Process" and "Overview of the Change Process," paying attention to the summary of discrete and continuous events. Review each event under "Discrete Events," building your understanding of the complexity of the change process. Also, carefully consider each of the values identified under "Guiding Values of the Process." (Jenlink et al., unpublished manuscript p. 5)

In this case one of the co-facilitators was a co-author of the GSTE, and the other spent much of the previous year studying the GSTE and reading articles written about the GSTE. So when it was time to conduct this Event, the co-facilitators already had the background knowledge of the GSTE and could skip to another guideline in Event 1. Another guideline requires the facilitator to conduct a preliminary self-assessment. The following are some suggestions offered by Event 1 for doing so:

- Outline your past and most recent experiences in working with school districts involved in change, focusing on context for change as well as the scope and breadth of change.

- Identify the types of change models and processes you have worked with, determining the role you played and your responsibilities.
- Summarize the skills and knowledge you were required to have in order to work with school districts undertaking change, listing the different categories.

(Jenlink et al., unpublished manuscript p. 5-6)

After this preliminary self-assessment, one of the major activities that Event 1 advises the facilitators to conduct is a self-assessment to determine their level of readiness and capabilities to facilitate a change effort. In this case the facilitators read through each of the items on the assessment, which fell under three major categories: 1) knowledge/skill areas, 2) personal growth, and 3) process management (Jenlink et al., unpublished manuscript). Each category includes concepts that are important for process facilitators to know. The self-assessment requires that the facilitators score themselves on each of the items within the three major categories to indicate the level of strength or weakness. For this case, the facilitators did not tabulate an official score (as advised by the GSTE), but noted for each category the areas in which they felt they needed more development.

What did and did not work well?

Overall the facilitators felt this event was valuable in determining their level of readiness. Most importantly it helped them to identify areas that they needed to develop prior to, and while engaging in, a systemic change process with a school district.

Event 1 is comprehensive and tedious in terms of the amount of time required to complete all areas of the assessment. In addition to completing the assessment, the GSTE also requires that the facilitators score themselves and determine the areas where they are most in need of development. In this case the facilitators did not find the scoring system to be helpful in assessing their readiness and capability. They did however find the assessment questions to be very helpful in identifying the areas they felt needed further development. The facilitators felt
that having to score themselves on the self-assessment would be an unnecessary step in the process.

After having read through the entire event and determining the areas that needed most development, it occurred to the facilitators that it would have been a much less tedious process if the assessment had been in an electronic format. Therefore, the following recommendations for further development of Event 1 are suggested.

**Recommendations for Improving Event 1**

1. It is recommended that an electronic version of the self assessment be developed.

2. This electronic self assessment system (ESAS) should include various multiple choice questions, and at the completion of the assessment the facilitator should get a score for each section of the assessment (knowledge/skill, personal growth, and process engagement).

3. In addition, the ESAS should provide the facilitator with a compiled report outlining the areas needing more development.

4. Lastly, the ESAS should provide the facilitator with a list of suggested activities, readings, and videos to help develop the areas outlined in the report.

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**Event 2: Establish a Relationship with a School District**

This section provides first, a summary of what happened as Event 2 was conducted, and identifies ways in which “what happened” differed from the guidance offered by the GSTE and why. This includes identifying operational details that were not spelled out in the GSTE.

Second, evidence is shared about what did and did not work well while conducting Event 2.

Lastly, the researchers offer a summary of tentative recommendations for improving the GSTE.

The data in this study, and more specifically for this event, were collected through focus group sessions.
interviews with various stakeholders in the school district. The stakeholders were instrumental in helping the researcher to identify the strengths, weaknesses, and possible improvements to the GSTE for this specific case.

What Happened?

The GSTE states that facilitators can identify a school district to work with in the following ways:

- They [the district] approach you because of work you have published, publicity you have generated, or word of mouth from other districts with which you have worked.
- You approach them [the district] because you have heard they may be at a sufficient level of readiness and have a supportive superintendent. (Jenlink et al., unpublished manuscript p. 3)

In this case, the facilitators identified potential school districts by publicizing their interest in facilitating a fundamental change effort that would focus heavily on professional development and involve all stakeholder groups. They did so via an announcement in the newsletter of the Indiana Urban Schools Association. That announcement was distributed to the superintendents of the Indiana Urban Schools Association. Table 3 shows the announcement that was sent to the superintendents.

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Insert Table 3 about here
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Four superintendents contacted the facilitators to express interest. The facilitators conducted phone conversations with all four superintendents to explain what their interests and
motivations were and to learn about them, their motivations for change, their understanding of the need for systemic thinking, and several other conditions in their districts that the GSTE suggested and the facilitators felt were important to the success of a systemic change effort.

Event 2 of the GSTE provided enough detail, in the form of sample questions, for the facilitators to develop an interview protocol. Table 4 shows the protocol that was used flexibly during the four interviews.

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Insert Table 4 about here
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Based on these phone interviews, the facilitators selected the Metropolitan School District of Decatur Township as the district that they believed was the most ready for systemic change. This selection was made using the following criteria from the GSTE:

- Openness of the contact person and superintendent to our perspectives about the change process.
- Compatibility of the contact person’s and superintendent's mindsets with your perspectives.
- Either lack of existing agendas or flexibility about their agendas.
- The role they see you playing is compatible with your perspectives.
- Level of commitment to change on the part of the contact person and the superintendent.
- Your gut feeling (intuition) about the district. (Jenlink et al., unpublished manuscript p. 4)
The facilitators spent some time discussing what would be a reasonable traveling
distance, and this had some influence on their decision in selecting a school district to work with.
Decatur was approximately one hour from Bloomington. This consideration had not been
addressed at all in the list of criteria in the GSTE. Later in the process we discovered that it was
beneficial for the co-facilitators to have at least a half hour drive to plan the upcoming meeting
and a half hour drive to debrief the meeting and plan next steps. Sometimes a half hour was not
enough, but the full hour drive was always sufficient.

The facilitators made an initial visit to the school district to get to know the key players
better and for them to get to know the facilitators better. The following excerpt is from the
researchers’ field notes describing their first contact with the superintendent and assistant
superintendent.

As external facilitators meeting the superintendent and assistant superintendent for the
first time, it was important for each of us to spend some time introducing ourselves, our
background, education, and experiences. The introductions served as the icebreaker and
more importantly, they served as a start to building a long-lasting relationship with the
superintendent. (Field notes, 1/23/01)

Event 2 of the GSTE provided the facilitators with few suggested questions to ask during the
initial visit. The researchers found them to be inadequate. During the initial meeting on January
23, 2001, with the superintendent and assistant superintendent, they shared important
information about the culture of their school district (see Table 5).

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Insert Table 5 about here

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The points in Table 5 can help to identify and develop critical guiding questions for the initial visit that are not currently included in the GSTE. For example, from the point listed in Table 5 highlighting the superintendent’s excitement about the public relations department, we might ask, “How do you feel about the public relations department in your district?”

At the conclusion of our meeting, the superintendent, assistant superintendent, and facilitators all agreed to continue to the next event of the process to assess the school district’s readiness for systemic change (Event 3.1). The following excerpt is from the researchers’ field notes describing their (the superintendent, assistant superintendent, and the facilitators) plans for continuing on to the next event in the guidebook.

In order to assess the school district’s readiness for systemic change, we [the superintendent, assistant superintendent, and the facilitators] agreed that it would be best to meet with each of the stakeholder groups individually. The superintendent identified four stakeholder groups that we should meet with initially (Field notes, January 23, 2001, p. 3):

1. Teachers’ association
2. School board
3. Administrative team
4. Parents

What did and did not work well?

Overall Event 2 of the GSTE worked well in this case, as it proved to be useful to the facilitators. However, in some areas the event did not offer enough detail. When this was the case the facilitators needed to develop their own guidance in order to complete the event.
The facilitators did not stray much from the major guidelines in Event 2 and were successful in establishing a relationship with a school district. But they also found some important deficiencies in the GSTE. First, Event 2 lacked sufficient guidance on how to begin to identify a school district to engage in a systemic change effort. In this case the facilitators sent out an email to the director of the Indiana Urban Schools Association. He then sent this information in a newsletter to all the urban school superintendents in Indiana. This worked well in generating inquiries about our facilitation services, but other approaches for facilitators to publicize their services and availability may work better in other situations. Second, when identifying a school district with which to work, the facilitators found it helpful to decide on a reasonable traveling distance. Also, while we only visited one site, this was because only one site met all our criteria (because of the traveling distance). In other efforts it might be helpful to visit all sites that meet your minimum criteria, even though you will only choose one with which to work. Third, the facilitators had difficulty deciding what information to gather about the district. They ended up finding certain information to be helpful (see Table 5).

Upon reflecting back later in the change process, we feel it was important that the superintendent was the first contact person and that the superintendent contacted us in response to our announcement in a newsletter. The superintendent’s total commitment was important to the later success of the change effort. In sum, the following recommendations for further development of Event 2 are suggested.

Recommendations for Improving Event 2

1. More guidance is needed to help facilitators identify school districts with which to work. In this case a newsletter announcement was sent to members of the Indiana Urban Schools Association. Perhaps in another case, an announcement could be sent to the state department
of education or directly to school superintendents within an appropriate geographical area. In any case, some form of an announcement (email, newsletter, etc.) should be sent to the superintendents of the school districts with which the facilitators might want to work.

2. Add more detailed guidance to the GSTE by including the sample announcement for Event 2 (see Table 3).

3. Add the criterion of ‘reasonable traveling distance’ to the current criteria for selecting a school district for an initial site visit, and consider that in deciding where to send announcements.

4. Add mention that more than one site visit should be conducted if more than one site meets all your criteria.

5. Rephrase the critical information points gathered about the MSD Decatur district (see Table 5) into questions, and include them in the guidelines of Event 2. These questions should provide other facilitators with some help in deciding what information to gather about the district during the initial visit.

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**Event 3: Assess the District’s Readiness for Change and Negotiate a Formal Agreement**

There are two major activities in Event 3. The first activity, Event 3.1, is assessing the district’s readiness for systemic change. The second, Event 3.2, is negotiating a formal agreement. This section provides, first, a summary of what happened in the field as Event 3.1 was conducted, and identifies ways in which that differs from the GSTE and why. This includes identifying operational details that were not spelled out in the GSTE. Second, evidence is shared about what did and did not work well while conducting Event 3.1 out in the field. Then, the
researchers offer a summary of tentative recommendations for improving the GSTE. Finally, Event 3.2 is addressed.

What Happened?

This section describes first how the facilitators conducted each meeting to assess the district’s readiness for systemic change. This is followed by several sections describing in more detail each of the meetings with the various stakeholder groups.

Conducting the Meetings

On February 5 and 15, 2001, the facilitators met separately with 3-5 members of each stakeholder group, in the following order: 1) central administrative staff, 2) parents, 3) building principals, 4) teacher’s association officers, and 5) school board and superintendent. The purposes of the meetings were to explain their interests, motives, and view of change, and to assess the school district’s interest in and readiness for change and for neutral outside facilitators. Table 6 shows the protocol that was used during these meetings. This protocol was not part of the GSTE; however, the GSTE does include a process step entitled “Develop your interview protocols.”

The GSTE advises that the facilitator meet one-to-one with each of the key leaders from each stakeholder group. “One-to-one contact is often more effective” (Jenlink et al., unpublished manuscript p. 4) and can provide in-depth and rich responses. In this case, the facilitators felt it was important to try to reach several opinion leaders in each stakeholder group, and to gain a sense of their interest in, and readiness for, change. It was decided by the facilitators and the
superintendent that the most effective and efficient method of getting input from several key leaders in each stakeholder group was to meet in focus groups of about four leaders per stakeholder group. What follows is an account of the focus group meetings.

In all the focus groups the facilitators explained that they viewed their role as helping the stakeholders in the school district to decide what their schools should be like, not to tell them what changes to make. The stakeholders seemed both surprised and pleased with this. The facilitators also described in general terms the change process that they had found helpful in the past. The most important part of that process is to involve all stakeholders in generating a shared vision of their classrooms, schools, and district. But for this to be possible, they explained, they must all first work together to arrive at a set of shared beliefs and values as a foundation upon which to build their shared vision.

Meeting with Central Administrative Staff

On February 5, 2001, the facilitators had a lunch meeting with several of the central administrative staff: the superintendent, assistant superintendent, and director of instruction. The purposes of this meeting were primarily to continue building a relationship with the administrative staff, and to make a tentative decision regarding whether or not to work with the school district. Since this was their first time meeting with the director of instruction, the facilitators started with brief introductions. The administrators then described some of the history and trends in staff development initiatives at Decatur. The facilitators emphasized to them that they wanted to assess their interest in, and readiness for, change. The following comment made by the superintendent and affirmed by the other central administrative staff, was a good indication that they were interested and ready for change in their district:
In the past [ten years] Decatur had a clear vision and mission that everyone knew and believed in. That vision is now lost, and needs to be recreated. (Superintendent, Field notes, February 5, 2001)

On February 15, the facilitators met again with the director of instruction and for the first time with the associate superintendent for operations and the director of student services. During the meeting many issues (e.g., community characteristics, school district climate, and race relationships) arose in the administrators’ descriptions of the changes currently occurring in the school community and the changes they would like to see come to fruition.

Following the meetings with the central administrative staff, the facilitators set aside some time to review their field notes and to discuss a key question for this Event, “Does the school corporation administrative staff want to enter into a long term relationship with the facilitators?” The following excerpt is from the facilitators’ field notes.

Overall the school corporation administrative staff seems excited about the possibility of working with us. They are eager for us to begin the process, and they believe that this is a perfect time for a major change effort in Decatur. They believe and trust in the superintendent. We still need to meet other members of the staff that were not able to attend. They are hoping that we decide to work with them. (Field notes, February 15, 2001, p. 3)

Meeting with Parents

On February 5, 2001, we met with the PTA/O presidents of four of the seven schools in the district. And on February 15, 2001, we met with the remaining three PTA/O presidents. School and district culture were the predominant issues that arose during the focus group
meetings with the parents. One parent summed up the overall sentiment of the group with the following statement:

    Overall, parents are happy with the teachers and the job that they are doing. We do not blame the teachers for the problems we see in schools. We would like to see teachers not only teach academics, but also the social values, manners, and interpersonal skills needed to become positive and productive members of society. (Field notes February 5, 2001, p. 3)

As the meeting continued, we began to hear important differences in the culture of each of the schools in the district. For example, one of the parents stated, “The stereotype of the parent and student population at Stephen Decatur and Lynwood Elementary schools is dirty poor white trash” (Field notes, February 5, 2001, p. 3), and “There is very poor attendance among parents at the PTA/O meetings” in these schools (Field notes, February 5, 2001, p. 3). When describing one of the top two elementary schools in the district, one parent stated that “at West Newton Elementary parental involvement is outstanding, and parents do attend the teacher conferences” (Field notes, February 5, 2001, p. 3).

During both meetings the parents did not have anything positive or negative to say about the culture of the Middle School. There was some discussion around how the Middle School is structured. One parent, in describing the Middle School, stated that

    At the Middle school there is a team structure in place. It is somewhat similar to the school-within-a-school idea. Students are placed into a team by a computer program. There is also a gifted and talented educational program at the Middle School. (Field notes, February 5, 2001, p. 3)
Overall, the parents seemed concerned about the tone and culture of the high school. As one parent put it,

There are major problems at the High School. I know a parent whose son attends the high school, and she is concerned about the safety of her child, who has been getting bullied. She really doesn’t know what to do about the situation. (Field notes, February 5, 2001, p. 3)

Our meeting with the remaining three parent leaders on February 15, 2001, validated many of the concerns that emerged in the meeting we conducted on February 5. One parent stated her concern with the high school as follows: “Students at the high school are not being challenged. I have two children who attend the high school, and the high school is in disrepair.” (Field notes, February 15, 2001, p. 4)

During this second meeting the discussion moved away from the culture of the schools to the culture of the district. “I would like teachers and administrators to live in the community,” one parent commented (Field notes, February 15, 2001, p. 4). Many of the district personnel currently do not live in the community. There seems to be a divide between the district personnel and the community they serve.

Following our meetings with the parents, we set aside some time to review our field notes and to discuss a key question for this Event, “Do the parents want to enter into a long term relationship with us?” The following excerpt is from the field notes of our meeting on February 15, 2001.

Parents are not happy with the current conditions of the Decatur schools. They are satisfied with the education their children have received thus far, but are afraid that the
conditions are deteriorating. They are very interested in being involved in a change effort and entering into a long-term relationship with us. (Field notes, February 15, 2001, p. 3)

Overall our meetings with the parents were very informative and gave important information for our decision about whether or not to work with the district. In this case, the parents were comfortable in describing the culture of each of the schools that they represented. Parents seemed to value hearing how other parents perceived the culture of their schools. It was also helpful for the facilitators to gain a better understanding of the various cultural differences in the district.

Meeting with Building Principals

The facilitators met on two separate occasions with the building principals. First, on February 5, 2001, they met with the elementary school principals, and then on February 15, 2001, they met with the middle and high school principals. The following are quotes from the facilitators’ field notes, of their meetings with the principals. These quotes give some indication of the perspective of each of the principals. More important for this project, the principals’ perspectives provided the facilitators with insights that helped them make the decision on whether or not to work with the school district.

One of the elementary school principals shared her thoughts as to whether or not the district was ready for change: “I feel that people are ready for a change. It’s the perfect time. The district currently has no vision, and the community doesn’t know what they want from the schools.” (Field notes, February 5, 2001, p. 4)

Another principal of an elementary school was disappointed in what had been happening in her school. She was new to the district, and during the meeting she shared her frustration: “It wasn’t what I expected. I heard great things about this district, and I have been let down. I feel
that teachers are ready for change, but I worry that the teachers’ association may be resistant to change.” (Field notes, February 5, 2001, p. 4)

The principal of one of the top elementary schools in the district shared her feelings with the group. Of all the principals present at the meeting, this principal had been working in Decatur for the longest period of time. The following excerpt is from the field notes of our meeting.

… any change effort should begin by reexamining the focus of the district. I feel that the district needs a common language. We should revive the good things that have been done, and create organized abandonment. Organized abandonment means coming to consensus on throwing out processes that don’t work. In the past Decatur had a mission and goals, but over time people have forgotten them. When the [district] leadership changes, the system changes. (Field notes, February 5, 2001, p. 4)

On February 15, 2001, we met with the principals of the middle school and high school. The principal of middle school wanted change to occur. He said, “There is a real desire on the part of the teachers to change. Currently, it is very hard to give students one-on-one immediate feedback. Facilities need to change in order to accommodate the needs of students.” (Field notes, February 15, 2001, p. 3) The principal of the high school wanted to see the following changes:

1. More effective teaching methods
2. Increase in community involvement
3. Changes in attendance structure

Personally, he wanted to learn skills and techniques to facilitate change. (Field notes, February 15, 2001, p. 4)

Following our meetings with the principals, we set aside some time to review our field notes and discuss a key question for this Event, “Do the principals want to enter into a long-term
relationship with us?” The following excerpt is from the field notes of our meeting on February 15, 2001: “The principals feel excited about the opportunity for change. They feel it is a perfect time to take on a change effort. They said they were indeed interested in entering into a long-term relationship with us.” (Field notes, February 15, 2001, p. 4)

Overall our meetings with the building principals were very informative and an important part of the process. The principals seemed to know each other well and seemed to have good working relationships with each other. The meetings provided the facilitators with some initial insights into whether they felt their schools needed change and were ready for change.

Meeting with Teachers’ Association Officers

Of all the meetings, this meeting with the teachers was the most intense. The teachers’ association president came in asking such questions as: “Why are we here? Where are the other stakeholders? Is this about Public Law 221? Did the Superintendent hire you?” (Field notes, February 5, 2001, p. 5). As facilitators, we were prepared to answer the bombardment of questions. It was a bit intimidating at first, but once we introduced ourselves and explained why we were there and that we were a neutral party, the waters calmed.

It was truly amazing to watch the flow of the meeting. At first, we did not think the representatives would be interested in working with us. It was clear that they lacked trust in the current system. They hadn’t been part of the decision making process. The people who had the most direct impact on the children’s education seemed to have no voice under the current system. The representatives wanted this to change. By the end of the meeting, the president of the teachers’ association apologized for being so animated. The rest of the members stated, “You must love working with people in order to be able to withstand such bombardment!” (Field notes, February 5, 2001, p. 5)
Three issues seemed to help persuade the teachers’ association to decide to work with us (Field notes, February 5, 2001):

1. Our neutrality in the process.
2. The nature of systemic change, and the idea of ALL stakeholders being a part of the decision-making process.
3. Both facilitators had been teachers and could identify with the representatives and their frustrations. This was key in beginning to gain their trust! (p. 5)

Following our meetings with the teachers’ association representatives, we set aside some time to review our field notes, and to discuss a key question for this Event, “Does the teachers’ association want to enter into a long-term relationship with us?” The following excerpt is from the field notes of our meeting on February 5, 2001: “Surprisingly, by the end of the meeting the president of the teachers’ association and the other representatives were all very excited about working with us on a change effort, and developing a long-term relationship.” (Field notes, February 5, 2001, p. 6)

Overall our meeting with the teachers’ association representatives was very informative and a necessary part of the process. The teachers did not seem to have been informed of the purpose of the meeting. One improvement that should be made to the process is to make sure that all stakeholders understand the purpose of the meeting they are asked to attend, prior to the meeting.

Meeting with the School Board and Superintendent

On February 5, 2001, we had our first dinner meeting with the board of education. The superintendent was also present. We started with introductions, and explained why we were there. They wanted to know in concrete terms the meaning of systemic change. At first they
assumed we were coming in with a specific agenda/program. As the meeting went on, they began to understand that we were not there to implement a program, but to facilitate a process that would engage them in deciding what changes to make. They were interested in knowing more about the process that we had to offer. They wanted specific examples of what the process would be like (Field notes, February 5, 2001). We explained that we would offer them guidance every step of the way, and that we were interested in building a long-term relationship with them.

Following our meetings with the board of education, we set aside some time to review our field notes, and to discuss a key question for this Event: “Does the board of education want to enter into a long term relationship with us?” The following excerpt is from the field notes of our dinner meeting on February 5, 2001: “By the end of the meeting the board of education seemed excited about working with us on a change effort, and developing a long-term relationship, though some were still concerned about trusting others with real power.” (Field notes, February 5, 2001, p. 6)

Our meeting with the board of education went well. This meeting was an important and necessary part of the process.

What did and did not work well?

Overall this Event worked well in that it helped the facilitators to assess the school district’s readiness and make a decision on whether or not to work with the school district. However, in some areas the event did not offer enough detail. When this was the case the facilitators developed their own guidance in order to complete the activity. Event 3.1 lacked sufficient guidance in helping the facilitators to develop an interview protocol. In this case the facilitators were able to create an interview protocol based on their previous experience and some help from the guidance offered in the GSTE. The interview protocol created in this case
worked well in helping the facilitators to gather enough important information to help them decide whether or not to work with the school district. In other cases, facilitators may find it helpful to create their own interview protocol.

Each of the focus group meetings provided the facilitators the opportunity to begin building relationships with the key stakeholders. All the stakeholders seemed eager to begin a change process and for us to serve as their process facilitators.

Recommendations for Improving Event 3

1. Currently the GSTE has a process step that is entitled “Develop your interview protocols.” More guidance is needed in this step to help facilitators develop their interview protocols. Therefore, it is recommended that the interview protocol that was developed in this case (see Table 6) be added to the GSTE as a sample.

2. Conduct interviews with stakeholders in focus groups rather than one-to-one. There are pros and cons in using both approaches. However, in this case, since both facilitators were outside facilitators (they did not work in the district), focus group interviews proved to be effective and efficient as a method for generating rich dialogue among key leaders.

3. Develop questions regarding race relations in the interview protocol.

4. Develop questions regarding school and district culture. One improvement that could be made to the interview protocol is to include a trigger question regarding the school and district culture. The answers to this question would help the facilitators understand the cultures that exist within each of the schools and in the district as a whole, ultimately allowing the facilitators to make a more informed decision on whether or not to work with the school district.
5. Make sure that all stakeholders understand the purpose of the meetings they are asked to attend (prior to the meeting).

6. Conduct focus group interviews with students and support staff.

7. Try not to conduct important meetings over dinner. Even though dinner meetings create a more relaxed environment, they tend to be very distracting, and people can lose focus.

**Event 3.2: Negotiate a formal agreement**

Deviating from the GSTE, we decided that a formal agreement to embark on this change journey (Event 3.2) was not necessary because we were not being hired by the school district. We felt that not being paid by the district allowed us to maintain neutrality as facilitators, so we resolved to work together with Decatur to get outside grant funding for our involvement. We did, however, feel that an informal agreement could be useful at this time, in order to have the systemic change effort endorsed broadly by as many stakeholders as possible. Thus, we decided to form the Core Team first, have them draft an informal agreement among all stakeholders, and then broaden the process to get input from the school board and all other stakeholders. This decision led to a final recommendation for improving Event 3:

8. Form the Core Team prior to negotiating a formal agreement

**Conclusion**

Hopefully, this article has provided the reader with a sense of what the earliest stage of the GSTE’s systemic change process is like, and why it is needed. Additionally, we hope the article has clarified the concept of “process” and why an understanding of the systemic change process is so important. Two promising change process models (KWS and GSTE) were described, and we presented the findings from our research and development initiatives on the
GSTE. We used the Formative Research methodology to study the initial stage of the systemic change process. This research studied the best of what we know about the theory and practice of systemic change in education.
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*Note. From Redesigning America’s Schools A Systems Approach to Improvement (p. 104), by Duffy et al., 2000, Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc.*
Table 2: Discrete Events of the GSTE

**Phase I – Assess Readiness and Capacity**
Event 1: Assess and enhance your readiness to be a facilitator
Event 2: Establish or redefine a relationship with a school district
Event 3: Assess district’s readiness for change and negotiate a formal agreement
Event 4: Assess the district’s capacity for change

**Phase II: Prepare Core Team**
Event 5: Select the participants for the Core Team
Event 6: Create the Core Team dynamic
Event 7: Capacitate the initial Core Team in systems design
Event 8: Design Events 9 - 11
Event 9: Identify competing change efforts
Event 10: Evaluate openness to change
Event 11: Evaluate the existing culture for change
Event 12: Design the process for expanding the Core Team

**Phase III: Prepare the Expanded Teams**
Event 13: Expand and build the Decisioning Team
Event 14: Select and build the Design Team
Event 15: Capacitate and enculturate the design team
Event 16: Redesign the change process

**Phase IV: Design a New System**
Event 17: Evolve mindsets about education
Event 18: Explore ideal beliefs and assumptions about education
Event 19: Select and build multiple design teams
Event 20: Explore ideal visions based on common beliefs
Event 21: Develop a system for evaluating the results of the change process
Event 22: Design a system of functions for each ideal vision
Event 23: Design the components for accomplishing each function
Event 24: Design the administrative and governance systems

**Phase V: Implement and Evolve the New System**
Event 25: Develop an implementation process for evolving to the new system
Event 26: Evolve, evaluate, and revise the new system
Table 3. Sample email to all urban school superintendents in Indiana

| Are you interested in how professional development, technology integration, and change can work together synergistically? The Indiana University Restructuring Support Services (RSS) would like to establish a long-term relationship with a small urban school system whose leadership is interested in a systemic (integrated) approach to dealing with these and other challenges it faces. |
| We are not interested in a relationship in which we tell you what you should do; we are interested in working with you in a process that will help you to decide what is best for you. The RSS will provide a skilled, competent facilitator and a support team to help you engage in an effective process for planning and change. We view our role as facilitating, not leading, that process. |
| What we ask of you is that you: |
| • Are interested in exploring fundamental changes |
| • Want to give all your community stakeholder groups participation and ownership in the change process |
| • Want to explore creative uses of technology to help all children learn … Are interested in creative ways to better meet your teachers' and administrators' professional development needs. |
| If you would like to consider building a long-term relationship like this, please contact me to set up a meeting. |
Table 4. Protocol for interviewing superintendents

- Explain what we are interested in doing and why, long-term relationship/effort.
- Ask why they are interested in change.
- Ask why they are interested in our working with them.
- Ask if they are interested in a district-wide effort.
- Ask for information about the district, what change efforts are going on there, who’s involved.
- Ask what leadership style the superintendent uses.
- Ask who are the major stakeholder groups and what role they should play.
- Ask what vision s/he has for the district, if any.
- Ask what conflicts and difficulties they are facing.
- Ask what are the major interests and activities of the major stakeholder groups.
- Ask about relationships that exist among the major stakeholder groups, levels of trust.
- Ask how much professional development is going on and what kind.
- Ask what questions s/he has about us.
- Explain a bit about our values and approach.
Table 5: Excerpt from 01/23/01 Field notes

- Trust building between the School Board and the Superintendent needs to occur.
- Currently the district operates in a top-down approach.
- Teachers have low expectations of students (especially true in upper grades).
- According to the superintendent, the high school is in need of the most help in terms of change. They will be hiring a new principal soon.
- The superintendent specifically addressed the need for a district-wide change effort.
- The School Corporation/Community has extremely high expectations of their sports activities.
- Historically, MSD Decatur Township has been the biggest employer in the community. This is now changing; the industrial sector is now becoming the biggest employer.
- According to the superintendent, “MSD Decatur has an excellent Publications Dept.” This will be crucial to spreading the word on not only educating the community about systemic change, but in gaining buy-in from all stakeholders in the community.
- Public Law 221 – Schools have to come up with a model to show how their schools are improving. (We need to gather some information regarding P.L. 221)
- We discussed funding for researchers through grant monies/district funds.
Table 6. Protocol for focus group meetings with stakeholders

Introductions
Why we are here
  Help communities interested in serious change – are looking at 4 communities
  Find out if you are interested in such change and in us as facilitators
  Explain the kind of help we provide
    Facilitate, not lead
    All stakeholders must have ownership, must want our help
    We must be impartial – no pay from district office
    Trust, confidentiality
Is there a need for improvement in your schools?
  What are you most dissatisfied with?
  What changes would you like to see? (Are they small or large?)
What should a good change process be like?
  Their thoughts
  Our view
What past and current change efforts?
  What did you think about each?
Who are the important stakeholder groups?
  Who are their leaders?
  How well do they get along with each other?
Do you want us to help you with change?