

**ENHANCING THE COPING SKILLS AND THE JOB WELL-BEING OF INTERNATIONAL  
SCHOOL TEACHERS IN BANGKOK: AN ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH**

**A DISSERTATION  
BY  
KANU PRIYA MOHAN**

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Applied Behavioral Science Research,  
at Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok.  
September 2008**

ENHANCING THE COPING SKILLS AND THE JOB WELL-BEING OF INTERNATIONAL  
SCHOOL TEACHERS IN BANGKOK: AN ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH

A DISSERTATION  
BY  
KANU PRIYA MOHAN

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Applied Behavioral Science Research,  
at Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok.

September 2008

Copyright 2008 by Srinakharinwirot University

ENHANCING THE COPING SKILLS AND THE JOB WELL-BEING OF INTERNATIONAL  
SCHOOL TEACHERS IN BANGKOK: AN ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH

AN ABSTRACT

BY

KANU PRIYA MOHAN

Presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Applied Behavioral Science Research,  
at Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok.

September 2008

Kanu Priya Mohan (2008). *Enhancing the Coping Skills and the Job Well-Being of International School Teachers in Bangkok: An Action Research Approach*. Dissertation, Doctor of Philosophy Degree (Applied Behavioral Science Research). Bangkok: Behavioral Science Research Institute, Srinakharinwirot University. Advisory Committee: Asst. Prof. Dr. Wiladlak Chuawanlee, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Pachongchit Intasuwan, and Asst. Prof. Dr. ChomChuen Somprasert.

There were three main objectives of this research. The first was to identify the stressful work demands among international school teachers and the need to cope effectively with them. The next was to enhance the coping skills of teachers through action research learning by strategies. The final objective was to develop recommendations, based on the research information, for enhancing coping behaviour among teachers of an international school and leading to an increase in their job well-being.

As an influence of globalization, international education is an emerging prerequisite of the day. Thailand is also no exception to this trend and over the last eighteen years it has recorded a breathtaking emergence in the international schools. The teachers who work in these international schools have a demanding task of multi cultural adjustment added to their typical professional challenges. The researcher's experience of working as the human resource manager with the international school teachers in Bangkok, Thailand provided a valuable insight in to the phenomenon of "teacher stress". This augmented by an academic interest in job well-being, lead to this research wherein an attempt was made to improve coping and job well-being of teachers.

This research was implemented as a human resource development project at the international school where the researcher had worked for four years. Voluntary participation was invited for this study which was implemented over three months following the essence of action research methodology. Twelve teachers working in three sections (kindergarten, elementary and secondary) of the school participated actively in this project. Various methods like group discussions, personal interviews, reflection journals and survey feedbacks were used to elicit information from the participants. Data were analyzed utilizing interpretative inductive approaches of qualitative data analyses.

The four cycles of the action research investigation lead the teachers to comprehend the importance of their job well-being by identifying the impediments to happiness at work or the work stressors. The sources of work stress were perceived as related to the work itself, the students, resource limitations at school, lack of management support, school policy and interpersonal relationships at work. The participants also found that four main areas of impact of work related stress were on self (physical and emotional), on interactions with students, on interpersonal relationships with family, and friends.

The participants went through a strategic planning process to cope effectively on a personal and group level. The teachers developed an understanding that the best coping strategies included a combination of techniques to attain balance on cognitive, emotional and physical dimensions. For the participants another important aspect related to their job well-being was determining the areas of school improvement. They recognized five broad areas which were proper school planning, school policies, professional development, personal development and social support activities.

The findings of this project were shared with the school's head and management. This channelled a significant impact of the research, as they implemented some of the feedbacks generated through the research. Though the school term ended soon there after, the process of school change had been set in motion. This research had been successful in stimulating a transformation process with the participant teachers, the school management and head.

## **Acknowledgements**

My efforts at research are supported by the eminent guidance of my team of advisors. I wish to express my profound gratitude to my main advisor, Asst. Prof. Dr. Wiladlak Chuawanlee who has academically guided my endeavours with exceptional patience. I convey my deep appreciation for the discerning supervision bestowed upon me by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Pachongchit Intasuwan. I also express my gratefulness to Asst. Prof. Dr. ChomChuen Somprasert, who has given critical and valuable insights to my academic pursuits.

I would like to extend a special word of thanks to the management and head of the international school where I implemented my action research project. I express my gratitude to all the participant teachers for their eager participation and a willingness to support this project. I cherish the opportunity to learn and enrich my self through an association with these participants during this process.

I wish to thank all the teachers, staff and my fellow students at the Behavioral Science Research Institute who have always helped me when ever I needed.

During this academic journey my path has been guided by my brilliant mother, Prof. (Dr) Vidhu Mohan. She has nurtured my spirit to go in search of academic fulfilment and enriched my life by numerous ways. My fantastic sister and my nephew have lent me their loving support. My in-laws have also been a source of encouragement.

I would like to dedicate this research to my family, my husband Manu and our children Ishan and Pranav, who have backed my academic pursuits with many personal sacrifices. This journey would be meaningless without their understanding, reinforcement and patience. The destination of the journey is embellished with the realization that it is not just mine but belongs to them as well.

**Kanu Priya Mohan**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	
The Research Context.....	3
The Research Problem.....	4
The Research Objectives.....	5
Scope of Research.....	5
Research Significance.....	6
Organization of the study.....	7
<b>2. LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	
International Education.....	8
International Schools in Thailand.....	9
International Schools Association of Thailand.....	10
Teachers in International Schools.....	11
Job Well-Being of Teachers.....	11
Factors influencing job well-being.....	13
Research evidence for job well-being.....	15
Coping and Job Well-Being.....	17
The coping process.....	18
Research evidence for Coping.....	18
Developing coping strategies.....	22
Implications of coping for the study.....	24
The Action Research Method.....	25
The action research process.....	27
Modes of action research.....	28
Action research in education.....	31
Research evidence for AR in education .....	32
Choosing Action Research.....	33

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

Chapter	Page
<b>3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b>	
Design of the Study.....	35
The Research Questions.....	36
Developing the Action Research Plan.....	36
Developing the Research Map.....	39
The International School context.....	40
The Participants.....	42
The Procedure.....	43
Data Collection.....	44
Sources of data.....	45
Method.....	46
Techniques.....	47
Rigor in research.....	49
Research Ethics.....	53
Data Analysis.....	55
<b>4. IMPLEMENTING THE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT</b>	
An Overview .....	58
Project Implementation .....	59
The Participants.....	59
Launching the Project.....	60
The Action Research framework.....	62
The Action Research Cycles.....	62
Cycle 1.....	65
Cycle 2.....	69
Cycle 3.....	72
Cycle 4.....	75
Conclusion from the AR cycles .....	78



## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

Chapter	Page
<b>5. THE RESEARCH FINDINGS &amp; DISCUSSION</b>	
Identification of the work stressors.....	82
Negative impacts of work stress.....	85
General coping responses of the teachers.....	87
Strategic planning for effective coping by the teachers.....	88
Areas of school improvement identified by the participants.....	100
Feedbacks and reflections of the participants.....	104
Conclusion.....	107
<b>6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION</b>	
Summary of findings.....	109
Inferences from the research findings.....	113
Applications of the knowledge.....	116
Recommendations.....	118
Conclusion.....	119
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>APPENDIX.....</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>VITAE</b>	

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table</b>	<b>Page</b>
1 Types of inquiry in action research.....	30
2 The data collection process.....	44
3 The research schedule.....	47
4 Criteria for judging rigor.....	52
5 The work stressors.....	84
6 Negative impacts of work stressors.....	86
7 Categories of general coping responses.....	88
8 Mind-body categorization of coping.....	94
9 Areas of school improvement.....	102

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure</b>	<b>Page</b>
1 The Research Link.....	3
2 The Cyclical Nature of Action Research Model.....	28
3 The Research Map.....	39
4 Components of Data Analysis.....	56
5 Guiding Framework for Action Research.....	62
6 The Action Research Project Cycles.....	63
7 Sequential flow of information.....	81
8 Strategic plan for enhancing coping.....	89
9 Classifying personal coping strategies.....	95
10 Conclusion from main findings.....	108
11 The process for enhancing coping & job well-being.....	116

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Work is an important aspect of our lives. However, increasingly we hear about the negative impacts of work – the “work stress”. Researchers have extensively investigated the area of “work stress” and noted the impact of stress on other domains of life as well. A review of literature highlighted that ‘teacher stress’ is a phenomenon with wide ranging impacts. Explaining this, Jarvis (2002) has written that “teacher stress is a real phenomenon and that high levels are reliably associated with a range of causal factors, including those intrinsic to teaching, individual vulnerability and systemic influences”. These consequences affect the individual, the institution and the society at large. Hence, it is imperative to understand and promote the job well-being of teachers from the view point of the individual, the organization and also as contribution to the research knowledge.

This research has been a culmination of over four years of study during the PhD programme that the researcher had enrolled for, along with a professional experience of working with international school teachers. The researcher’s academic interest has been towards positive psychology and the field of research enrollment has been in applied behavioral science.

On the professional front the researcher had the opportunity to work as a human resources manager at an international school in Bangkok, Thailand. As an applied behavioral science researcher this study gave an excellent opportunity to understand what really makes the teachers happy at their work place. The initial deliberations lead to a quantitative research investigation (Mohan, 2007) wherein international school teachers were surveyed to understand their job well-being and the person and situation related factors affecting it. The important findings of that study showed that international school teachers experience high levels of perceived work stress, which has a strong and negative impact on their job well-being. The results showed that personal factors influence job well-being and the personality factor of work locus of control influences the perception of the work stress.

The above findings were academically relevant and inspiring enough to further the research interest, but through another perspective, that of application of knowledge for the

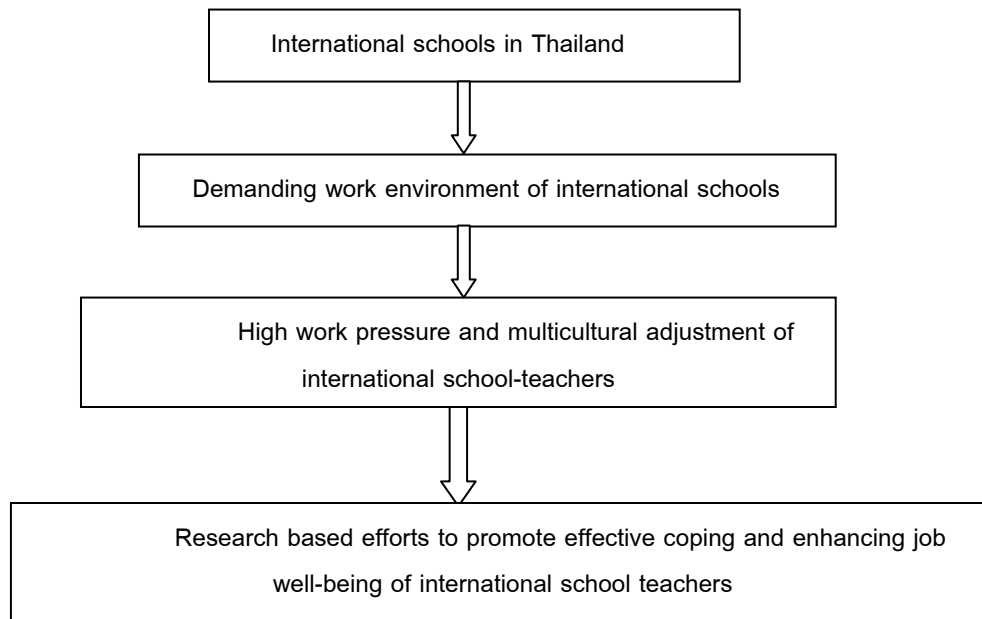
betterment of society. During the course of the researcher's academic pursuits, she was employed for four years in an international school in Bangkok, Thailand. In charge of the human resources section of the school, she interacted with the teachers closely. The research interest and this work related experience, whetted the desire to contribute to this same international school through a project to enhance the job well being of the teachers.

Applying the previous knowledge (Mohan, 2007) to the current research, the individual's own efforts were the key to change in the work place; hence teachers would engage in an action research process to evolve effective coping strategies to deal with their work related demands.

In the current research "coping" became the important link between the knowledge of job well-being, and its application, with the 'action research' as the tool for implementing the whole project. As explained by Troman and Woods (2001) teacher stress may be seen as the perception of an imbalance between demands at school and the resources teachers have for coping with them. The experience of stress has many symptoms that can include anxiety and frustration, impaired performance, and ruptured interpersonal relationships at work and home (Kyriacou, 2001). Since teachers experience high levels of stress at work, it is well-advised for them to develop strategies to cope with stress in their work and personal lives. Researchers have established that effective coping strategies reduce workplace related stress (Pines & Aronson, 1988). Effective coping behaviour allows them to deal with their work related demands and reduce the strain of stressors. Further more, researchers such as Steffes and Valentine (1996) have found effective coping behaviour is related to positive teacher outcomes like job commitment. Hence, this study endeavoured to facilitate better coping amongst the participant teachers of an international school.

The choice of action research as the methodology of this research provided the perfect platform to involve teachers and collaborate with them to create awareness about their need to cope with the work stress. According to Kemmis and Mc Taggart, (1982), the linking of the terms 'action' and 'research' highlights the essential feature of the method: trying out ideas in practice as means of improvement and as a means of increasing knowledge. Thus, this study, using the action research approach, aimed to help teachers cope better with the demands of their workplace and also add to the knowledge base of its impact on the job well-being of the teachers.

The research links and the milieu of this study have been depicted in figure 1, leading from the context of international schools to the current application.



**Figure 1** The Research Link

The following sections give an overview about the research context, the research problems and objectives, the scope of research, the research concepts, the research significance, and an overview about the organization of this study.

## **THE RESEARCH CONTEXT**

The research context for the study was that of international education in Thailand and the teachers working in one of the international school in Bangkok were the participants for this research study.

The impact of our rapidly changing world and globalisation has an immense influence in the field of education. According to Greenlees (2006) the impact of this global phenomenon is the huge and rapidly rising demand for international education. The international education scenario in Thailand also is no exception. Fredrickson (2005) has expressed that the growth of international education over the last 15 years, at all levels in Thailand, is truly breathtaking.

An important or rather the key dimension for any school is the human resource capital of the school and the schoolteachers are hence the most important aspect of the school's resources. However as stated by Russell, Altmaier, and Velzen (1987) evidence exists to verify that teaching is a particularly stressful occupation, with the stressful aspects of teaching also leading to extreme negative outcomes like burnout. Thus, as also mentioned by Pillay et al. (2005) in today's world there is a growing concern about teacher's well being as they are experiencing increasing levels of attrition, stress and burnout. Researchers also find that due to increasing stressors and teacher burnout, a number of competent teachers are leaving the classroom for alternative careers (Cunningham, 1982). This also supported by Humphreys (1995), according to who the stress in teaching is getting a fair degree of attention because:

1. The number of people getting out of the teaching profession is higher than number getting in.
2. There is rise in early retirement due to health reasons.

The task of the teachers working in international schools is even more challenging as along with the usual work stress they also face the multicultural adjustment to their work environments. Hayden and Thompson (2000) have aptly stated that the multicultural diversity of the international school environment adds to the work demands of the teachers working there. Thus, teachers working in international schools often experience problems in adjustment to a new culture along with the negative outcomes of stress like absence, sickness, burnout and turnover. It is not only important to understand how stress takes its toll on a teacher's life but it is also imperative to comprehend the impact of stress on the overall profession itself.

Hence it becomes necessary, although a challenging task to understand how the stressful job demands influence the job well-being of international school teachers.

## **THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

International school teachers face tremendous pressure at their work place which at times hinders their work performance as well as seriously impairs their job well-being. This may ultimately have a deterring influence on the development of the students whom they are teaching. Hence, the well-being of teachers can influence the school climate too. Research based efforts are needed to understand the job well-being of these teachers

and find out what measures may be taken to elevate it through better coping with the work demands.

## **THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

Based on the research background and the research problem, we developed the objectives of this research at the initial stages of the project. The objectives framed for this research were:

1. To identify the stressful work demands among international school teachers and the need to cope effectively with them.
2. To enhance the coping skills of teachers through action research learning by strategies based on developing individual as the resource for coping.
3. Based on the information obtained through the implementation of the action research project, to develop recommendations for enhancing coping behaviour among teachers of an international school, leading to an increase in their job well-being.

## **SCOPE OF RESEARCH**

The scope of research includes a brief about the participants in this research and the concepts of study and the theoretical underpinning of the research.

### **Participants**

The participants of the study were teachers working in one international school in Bangkok, Thailand. The researcher was working in this same school. The participants were invited to join the action research based project on a voluntary basis. Twelve teachers working in the three different school sections- the kindergarten, elementary and secondary collaborated actively in the research. These teachers participated in the action research cycles of the project over a period of three months.

### **Important Concepts in the Study**

Some of the important concepts under exploration in this research project were job well being, coping and action research.



### Job Well-Being

It refers to an individual's job specific feelings of overall psychological wellness.

### Coping

Coping is a process in which people employ specific efforts, both behavioural and psychological, in order to tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events.

### Action Research

The action research was the methodology adopted for the research study. According to Kemmis and Mc Taggart, (1982), the linking of the terms action and research highlights the essential feature of the action research method: "trying out ideas in practice as means of improvement and as a means of increasing knowledge".

## **RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE**

This study was an attempt to contribute to the society through the application of knowledge that accrued by research. The areas of contribution of the study were that this research:

1. Created awareness among the participants and other teachers at the international school about the importance of job well-being.
2. Enabled the teachers to recognise that the change in their work place can be brought about by self through effective coping behaviour.
3. Facilitated the teachers to identify their sources of stress as well as their resources for effective coping with this stress. This is aimed at having far reaching impacts which may not be measured at the time of project implementation. For instance in a study, Neves de Jesus and Conboy (2001) conducted a training course, where in participating teachers showed a significant decrease in their irrational beliefs and professional distress, as well as an increase in professional motivation and the perception of wellbeing
4. Initiated a process of self reflection and improvement for these teachers. This statement gains strength from the works of Little (1982) and, Lieberman and Miller (1994) who describe changes that occur when teachers are encouraged to talk with one another and work together to find solutions to common problems: "In the process of encouraging these activities, traditions of practicality, isolation and privacy were replaced by shared ownership of issues

and problems of practice, a willingness to consider alternative explanations, and a desire to work together as colleagues”.

5. Launched a process for the school management to link the improvement in the school with the well-being of teachers. Noolan Jr. and Hoover (2004) have also corroborated that the benefits of action research for the school as a whole follows from the benefits for the individual teacher.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

The following chapters of the thesis are organized to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the research study. Chapter 2 explores relevant literature surrounding international education and teachers, job well-being, coping and the action research method. Chapter 3 describes the study's methodology, the design, the school background, the participants, developing the action research plan, the data collection procedure, the data analysis, the rigour and research ethics of the study. Chapter 4 elaborates the action research process during the project implementation at the school. Chapter 5 reports the action research based findings of the study, their interpretation and discussion. Chapter 6 presents the summary of the findings, applications of knowledge, recommendations and conclusion.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The intention of this research was to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the teachers' job well being related to working in an international educational scenario, and also to contribute to the applied aspect of behavioral science by developing some action research based strategies for teachers to cope better with demands of their workplace.

This section of the thesis begins with an overview about the research milieu of international education, which goes on to emphasize the specific context of international schools in Bangkok, Thailand.

This is followed by the literature review about the important concepts in this research. It begins with the background about the concept of job well being and its importance in the lives of teachers. This section then proceeds to highlight the context of the current research through the pervious study of the researcher – a quantitative investigation of the job well-being of teachers in international schools in Bangkok. Subsequent to this is the importance of the role of coping in the highly stressful work environment and its implications for the current research.

Finally this chapter ends with a look at the choice of action research as the methodology and its relevance to the current research.

### **THE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION**

The widespread marks of globalization touch all spheres of life and especially an important one, that of education. The term "international education" is no longer an unfamiliar concept but a widely accepted form of imparting education in all countries, breaking all barriers of physical distances. The participants of this study were teachers working in international schools and are imparting "international education".

For a better understanding, we must know that there are certain prerequisites of international education. In a lucid summary of international education Thompson (1998) has expressed that there are 5 pillars guiding the programme development for an international curriculum:

1. Exposure to others of different cultures within the school.
2. Teachers as exemplars of “international mindedness”.
3. Exposure to others of different cultures outside the school.
4. A balanced formal curriculum.
5. A management regime that is value consistent with an international philosophy.

An intermingling of various cultures predominantly marks the nature of the international education. According to Hayden and Thompson (2000) a striking picture of an international school or international education is a lack of homogeneity or a presence of heterogeneity. The community associated with international schools is also a diverse one. Then what is an international school by definition? The authors go on to say that no one so far has come up with a definition of “international school” that does not exclude some schools which consider themselves international and does include others which may not as well. It is clear that no two international schools have all the same characteristics. In fact it is the “diversity” in the international education, which makes the teachers working in these schools finding themselves with different cultural contexts, stimulating, and challenging.

Hayden and Thompson (2000) have stated that at the micro level the diversity that characterizes the international schools comes from the numbers of different nationalities, different cultural backgrounds, different languages spoken and different religious beliefs of the students and the teachers in these schools. According to Walker (2000) the deliberate planned interaction of students from different cultural backgrounds is widely regarded as a corner stone of international education.

### **INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS IN THAILAND**

Over the last few decades, there has been a spurt in the number of international schools in Thailand (Bangkok Post 2007). Diverse is a word that best describes these international schools. Teachers and students in an international school represent many nationalities and educational backgrounds. As international schools have grown in number in Thailand, the students attending these schools vary widely in terms of their ethnic background, interest and ability. International schools now educate students from pre-school through the primary and secondary stages to the tertiary level in preparation for entrance to higher

education either in Thailand or abroad. School size varies considerably from large (2000+ students) to small (less than 100). International schools are located in Bangkok and across Thailand from Chiang Mai to Phuket, offering both day and boarding programs.

A leading Thai newspaper, Bangkok Post published a special supplement on “International Education in Thailand” (2005). In this handbook, Fredrickson, the Bangkok Post education expert, has expressed that the growth of international education over the last 15 years, at all levels in Thailand, is truly breathtaking. He goes on to write that globalization is part of the reason. Most of these international schools employ teachers of different nationalities including Thai nationals. With the exception of a small number of international schools, which exist to provide education almost exclusively for the nationals of a particular country, the majority of international schools in Thailand have a multi-national intake.

To further explain the scenario of international schools in Thailand Watkinson (2006) writes: *“Thai demands for a Western education became overwhelming and the authorities finally opened the floodgates in the early 1990s, allowing Thai nationals to enrol at international schools. The proviso was that schools had to teach Thai language to all Thai nationals; and teach Thai cultural studies to all students, regardless of nationality. The exponential growth of the international school sector in Thailand had truly begun. Many neighbouring countries, China and Burma for example, still prohibit their nationals from attending international schools. Consequently, Thailand has developed something of a regional monopoly in the international school stakes”.*

Thus as the demand for international schools grows, the requirement for employing teachers in these international schools also rises. It also becomes imperative for the schools to recruit the right staff and also retain them. Hence it is significant for the school managements to appreciate the value of sustaining the job well-being of the teachers working there.

#### **INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION OF THAILAND**

In Thailand, most of the international schools are registered with a body called “ISAT” or the *International Schools Association of Thailand*. ISAT ([www.isat.or.th](http://www.isat.or.th)) reports that starting from 45 original members in 1994 it has now over 86 member schools offering a range of curricula from American, British and International systems. ISAT’s principal 'raison d'être' is to act as a link between its member international schools, on the one hand, and the Ministry of

Education and the Office of the Private Education Commission in particular, on the other. ISAT further reports that two things distinguish an international school. First, an international school has chosen to follow or adopt a curriculum from another system of education that is different from its host country. And second, the language of instruction is usually English.

### **TEACHERS IN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS**

Occupational psychologists recognize the teaching profession as one of the highly demanding ones. Teaching in international schools is unique in that there is a multi-cultural environment in these schools, with the students of different cultural backgrounds studying here. Most of these international schools employ teachers of different nationalities too including Thai nationals. For the teachers working in international schools, adjusting to the multi-cultural requirements of the students, and co-teachers and other staff adds on to the usual demands of teaching profession (Hayden & Thompson, 2000).

The cultural mix of the staff at schools requires not only individual level adjustment but also an interpersonal one. There in brings in an interesting aspect of “expatriate” stress and adjustment of the foreign teachers. The “expat” teachers as they are called, experience “sojourner stress”. Shupe and Mc Grath (1998) express that sojourner stress is important because many aspects of stress and coping cycle are intensified, or rendered more problematic when the person experiencing stress is from a different culture than the one in which the stressful situations are occurring. There is accumulation of effects from all past stress cycles that constitute the sojourners overall adaptation as manifested in job satisfaction, distress resulting from non-work related hassles, psychological well-being and health conditions.

Bearing this background about the teachers in international schools, and the experience of the researcher working in such a school, the research went on to investigate the job related well-being of these teachers.

### **JOB WELL-BEING OF TEACHERS**

Keeping in view the ‘positive health’ perspective adopted by the researcher, the research aimed to provide research based application towards the enhancement of the job well-being of teachers and consequently improving the school climate. According to Warr (1999) the general construct of job well-being refers to the extent to which a person feels

satisfied with his or her job as a whole. The concept of job well-being is important to both the individual and the organization where he is employed as the individual's feelings of job well-being have impact on both the individual and also the organization.

'Job related well-being' is a state of physical health and psychological wellness that allows for better functioning in a work environment. As put forth by Blalock and Blalock (2002), the job well-being refers to a state, that implies the ability to balance personal and work life, and is associated with physical, psychological, social and spiritual health.

The work sphere is an important part of human life. With increasing demands of changing life styles and a dynamic world, the workplace is changing too. It becomes increasingly imperative not only to the scientists but also to the work related groups like managements of organizations to understand what really motivates an employee so that he works effectively and efficiently. Researchers like Strauser, Ketz, and Keim (2002) have emphasized that both work stress and job satisfaction are important factors which directly influence organizational outcomes. What an individual experiences not only affects him but also the place where he works. For instance a satisfied employee would demonstrate job commitment and loyalty.

Further more the feelings of well-being at work influence other domains of an individual's life. Research based evidence exists to show that job well-being has its impact on over all feelings of well-being too (Diener, Gohm, Suh, & Oishi, 1998).

Now we go on to review the relevance of job well-being, keeping the teachers in perspective. Traditionally, the teaching role has been one of nurturing and developing students' potential. In their research review Cooper, Cooper, and Eaker (1986) point out that teaching profession is often cited as one of the most stressful professions. However, teachers' work today comprises a complex mix of various factors that include teaching; learning new information and skills; keeping abreast of technological innovations and dealing with students, parents and the community. As emphasized by Pillay et.al. (2005) there are demanding roles that a teacher has to play and there are growing concerns about teacher well-being and competence. Further more the authors say that teacher well-being and competence have been related to job satisfaction and studies indicate that those teachers who are less satisfied are more likely to leave teaching to join other professions.

From the applied behavioural scientist's perspective, it then became a challenge to understand and if possible to recommend some strategies to improve the job well-being of teachers. The following sections gives more details about the factors that influence job well-being, the research evidence for understanding job well-being and also about the choice of 'job well-being' as the area of research interest.

### **FACTORS INFLUENCING JOB WELL-BEING**

Job well-being is a complex phenomenon with various factors influencing it. As an individual works, his job well-being is influenced by factors both within the individual and also the situation in which the individual works.

In the work environment a worker is interacting with his co workers, supervisors, and is constantly influenced by the factors such as the salary drawn, benefits and bonus, the work policies, facilities provided to him. How the individual perceives the impact of the situational factors is determined by his own personality. On the other hand, an individual may term a situation stressful due the very nature of the situation or due to his/her own personal characteristics. As Riggio (1996) goes on to broadly classify the sources of worker stress as arising from the individual or the environment:

1. Individual's personal characteristics- cause the dispositional stress.
2. Environment- causes the situational stress

Thus the broad dimension of work outcomes with work stress on one end and the job well-being on the other is impinged upon the situation and person factors. According to Daniels and Guppy (1994) many variables, both of a personal cognitive nature and of a social/organizational nature have been theorized to influence the individual's feelings of occupational stress and well-being. The following discussion takes a review of the personal and then the situational factors influencing job well-being.

#### **Personal Factors and Job Well-being**

There are various personal characteristics which influence the job well-being of an individual. Judge, Locke, and Durham (1997), refer to the broad personality construct of "core self-evaluations" which has strong impact on job satisfaction. This construct refers to the empirical associations that exist between the personality correlates of self-esteem, generalized



self-efficacy, neuroticism and locus of control, and that help to understand the “personological” or the personality related basis of job satisfaction. According to Judge and Bono (2002), the theory states that the core self evaluation traits of self-esteem, generalized self efficacy, neuroticism and locus of control have a strong empirical association which influences their overall impact on occupational outcomes of job satisfaction and job performance.

Literature review shows that many other personality factors have been researched to understand their relationship with the job well-being and job satisfaction. In his study Tudor (1997) provides further evidence that self-efficacy, work locus of control, and job involvement are promising self-beliefs for dealing with the direct causes not just the indirect symptoms of workplace stress perceptions. These personal characteristics mould the individual’s work experience.

Thus, as the job well-being refers to how an individual “feels” about his work, this complex “feeling” is influenced by the personality make up of the individual too.

### **Situational Factors and Job Well-being**

The job well being of an individual is influenced not only by what he is, the ‘work personality’, but also from the ‘work situation’ in itself. There is a need to understand how the variables or the characteristics of the workplace would work in congruence with the work personality to have its impact on the work outcome.

A workplace presents an individual many demands. These situations are not in themselves stressful, but the appraisal by the individual and his assessments make them stressful. Hence the situational variables are “perceived” as demanding or stressful by individuals. Parasaruman and Alutto (1984) have expressed that “job stressors” are defined as job demands, constraints, and or opportunities, and job related events or situations that might affect the individual’s feelings of stress.

Research evidence exists to show the negative impacts of each of the situation variables on the job well-being of employees. For instance, extreme demand and work overload can produce extensive strain (Caplan & Jones, 1975). The variable of workload is often cited as the most stressful for teachers (Jarvis, 2002). According to Buunk, et al. (1998) the factor of interpersonal conflict at work in general is very stressful and is accompanied by high levels of strain. When stress is related to the role demands in a workplace, affects the work outcomes.

For instance, Terry, Neilsen and Perchard (1993) found that role conflict and role ambiguity remain significant predictors of psychological well-being and job satisfaction.

Career insecurity factors such as pay, promotion, recognition and support by management are perceived as directly linked to job satisfaction. According to Buunk, et al. (1998) the low status of a profession may affect employees' well-being negatively, particularly when they feel they are entitled to more. A study among teachers in Connecticut, U.S.A., showed that the low pay and low status of the job were considered to be the main problems (Litt & Turk, 1985).

With this picture about factors influencing the job well-being, we further review the research evidence to gain an understanding about the importance of job well-being at the work place.

### **RESEARCH EVIDENCE FOR JOB WELL-BEING**

Existing literature and research based evidence clearly reveals that job well-being is related to work outcomes. Warr (1999) has pointed out that higher levels of employee well being is significantly associated with better job performance, lower absenteeism, reduced probability of leaving an employer and the occurrence of more discretionary work behaviours (like organizational commitment).

According to Huff (2000), feelings of job satisfaction have been empirically demonstrated to relate to a variety of organizationally relevant outcomes. These outcomes include employee performance, absenteeism and turnover, motivation, job involvement, organizational commitment, and employee physical and psychological well-being.

This current research also aimed to build up information, along the research interest of the researcher, in the area of "**employee job well-being**". Earlier studies of the researcher, (Mohan, 2004; Mohan, 2007) were conducted to understand the concept of job well being within two different work settings, for the managers working in telecom firms, followed by the teachers working in international schools. Both researches revealed an interesting interaction between the person and situation variables on the outcome of job well-being.

The first study (Mohan, 2004) was designed to examine the job related well-being of managers in the Thailand's telecom sector, in relation to some work variables, which have been identified as "organizational stressors". Seventy-eight managerial level employees were

surveyed. There were forty four participants from the government sector and thirty four from the private sector firms. The results show that the organizational stressors of interpersonal conflict at work and organizational constraints have a negative correlation with job well-being. The results did not support the hypothesized role of the personality variable of work locus of control as a moderator of the relationship between the job well-being and the organizational stressors. However, additional analysis of the variables in the study showed that the perception of organizational stressors mediates the pathway between the work locus of control and the job related well-being. Summarizing the results we can say that work related well being is a function of both the individual and the work environment.

The subsequent research (Mohan, 2007) went further to explore the interplay of the personality and environment factors with the job well-being. In this research, eighty-two teachers from four international schools in Bangkok, Thailand were surveyed to understand the role of the person and the perceived situation variables on their job well-being. Out of all the person variables (work locus of control, self-esteem and teacher self-efficacy), only the work locus of control (external orientation) had a statistically significant negative correlation with the job well-being. This study investigated the variables of workload, interpersonal conflict, role stress, and career insecurity factors as the perceived situation (or stress) variables affecting the job well being of teachers working in international schools. Statistically significant negative correlations existed between all the perceived situation variables (workload, interpersonal conflict, role stress, and career insecurity) and job well-being. Structural equation modelling (SEM) technique was utilized and results showed an adequate “fit” of the research model, where the person and situation variables were the latent exogenous variables for the endogenous variable of job well-being. The results of the study supported the view that internal characteristics of an individual tend to dictate how they will react to stressful events (Fimian, 1982), and work locus of control is one such important characteristic.

The above results gain support from the literature and indicate that the international school teachers ‘perceive stress’ from various sources at their work place and also that their job well-being is a function of both the individual and the work environment. However, these results also showed that an individual’s internal characteristics could mould the perception of the stress and impact the feelings of job related well-being.

The above research studies were limited in scope but added to the researcher's interest in the field of job well-being. This interest grew as she worked along with teachers in an international school and observed their work related perceptions of stress. To recapitulate the reasons guiding the selection of "job well-being" as the area of research interest:

1. Existing literature and research based evidence clearly reveals that job well-being reflects an individual's feelings about his work place and is also related to positive work outcomes (Huff, 2000; Pillay et al., 2005). So academically this construct is of great relevance in work sphere.

2. Teaching profession is very stressful and the task of international school teachers is compounded (Hayden & Thompson, 2000). The job wellbeing of teachers is at stake because of their work demands and resultant stress. This is of importance not only to the individual teacher but also the school management and finally to society at large.

3. This study provided a research based opportunity to develop knowledge and also apply information for enhancing the "employee job well-being". The researcher had earlier conducted studies to understand the concept of job well being within two different work settings, for the managers working in telecom firms (Mohan, 2004), followed by the teachers working in international schools (Mohan, 2007).

4. The focus of the current research was teachers working in an international school. Previous research findings (Mohan, 2007) have clearly pointed out that the international school teachers experience high levels of 'perceived work stress' which has direct and significant influence on their job well-being. However, the individual's internal characteristics can mould the perception of the stress and impact the work related well-being. This project facilitated the application of this knowledge by making use of individual's intrinsic characteristics to change the way they perceive stress and hence lead to improved job well-being.

With the significance of job well-being in perspective, next to be reviewed is the importance of coping and its relationship with job well-being, and the implications for the current research.

## **COPING AND JOB WELL-BEING**

In the current research, the coping process has a special significance not only in its role in the stressful environment - individual transaction, but also from the importance of using

this information for the purpose of designing an action research project. The researcher applied the knowledge about the coping behaviour in improving the job related well-being of teachers working in the stressful international schools' environment.

To understand the implication of the above we will take an overview about the process of coping, the research evidence supporting the role of coping in the stress-outcome relationship, the cognitive restructuring theory and the importance of developing coping strategies. This section is concluded by understanding the research implications of coping for the current research.

### **THE COPING PROCESS**

With the experience of 'stress' increasing, the academic and applied interest in the process by which people 'cope' with stress has grown dramatically over the past few decades. The starting point for much of this research is the conceptual analysis of stress and coping offered by Lazarus in 1966 (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lazarus argued that stress consists of three processes:

1. Primary appraisal is the process of perceiving a threat to oneself.
2. Secondary appraisal is the process of bringing to mind a potential response to the perceived threat.
3. Coping is the process of executing that response.

When faced with a stressor, a person evaluates the potential threat (primary appraisal). Primary appraisal is a person's judgment about the significance of an event as stressful, positive, controllable, challenging or irrelevant. Facing a stressor, the secondary appraisal follows, which is an assessment of people's coping resources and options (Cohen, 1984). Secondary appraisals address what one can do about the situation. Actual coping efforts aimed at regulation of the problem give rise to outcomes of the coping process. Hence, coping efforts are actual strategies used to mediate primary and secondary appraisals.

### **RESEARCH EVIDENCE FOR COPING**

There has been some remarkable research in the area of stress and the process of coping. Different researches have put across various types of coping strategies that are employed by an individual to deal with stress. Broad distinction in the strategies for coping are

basically of two types, emotion focused versus problem focused, and direct versus indirect active coping. Though there are many other proponents in the field of coping research, the following section discusses the two main distinctions in coping strategies and also gives research based evidence.

### **Problem vs. Emotion Focused Coping**

Lazarus made one of the groundbreaking efforts in 1966. He stated the importance of the concept of appraisal, and coping with respect to stress processes as the key factors for understanding stress-relevant transactions. Since its first presentation as a comprehensive theory by Lazarus in 1966, the Lazarus stress theory has undergone several essential revisions (Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus and Folkman 1984; Lazarus and Launier, 1978). In his latest version Lazarus (1991), emphasize that stress is regarded as a relational concept, i.e., stress is not defined as a specific kind of external stimulation, nor a specific pattern of physiological, behavioral, or subjective reactions. Instead, stress is viewed as a relationship ('transaction') between individuals and their environment. This theory distinguishes two basic forms of appraisal, primary and secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal concerns whether something of relevance to the individual's well being occurs, whereas secondary appraisal concerns coping options.

Further, to study the coping process, Lazarus and his colleagues developed a measure called "Ways of Coping" (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980); which has since been revised (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). This measure consists of a series of predicates, each of which portrays a coping thought or action that people sometimes engage in when under stress. According to Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989), embedded in the Ways of Coping Scale is a distinction between two general types of coping. The first, termed *problem-focused* coping, is aimed at problem solving or doing something to alter the source of the stress. The second, termed *emotion-focused* coping, is aimed at reducing or managing the emotional distress that is associated with (or cued by) the situation. Although most stressors elicit both types of coping, problem-focused coping tends to predominate when people feel that something constructive can be done, whereas emotion-focused coping tends to predominate when people feel that the stressor is something that must be endured (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). However as concluded by Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989), the outcomes of effective coping are emotional well-being, functional status, health behaviors.

Differentiating the problem focused and emotion focused coping strategies, Folkman and Lazarus (1980) differentiated each type and enumerated their further classification which is depicted below-

1. Problem-Focused Coping: include the following three types:

1.1 *Confronting*, which means changing a stressful situation assertively. For example, "I stood my ground and fought for what I wanted."

1.2 *Seeking social support*, which means obtaining emotional comfort and information from other people. The seeking of social support, in particular, appears to be a valuable problem-focused coping strategy.

1.3 *Planful problem solving*, which means solving a stressful problem through deliberate problem-focused strategies.

2. Emotion-Focused Coping: include the following five types:

2.1 *Self-controlling*, this means regulating one's feelings. For example, "I tried to keep my feelings to myself."

2.2 *Distancing*, which means detaching oneself from a stressful situation. For example, "I didn't let it get to me; I tried not to think about it too much."

2.3 *Positively reappraising*, this means finding positive meaning in a stressful experience by focusing on personal growth. For example, "I changed my mind about myself."

2.4 *Accepting responsibility*, which means acknowledging one's role in a stressful problem. For example, "I realized I brought the problem on myself."

2.5 *Escaping/Avoiding*, which means wishful thinking or escaping or avoiding a stressful situation by way of activities like eating, drinking, or using alcohol or other drugs. For example, "I wished that the situation would go away or somehow be over with".

### **Direct vs. Indirect Active Coping**

Pines and Aronson (1988) have identified direct active and indirect active strategies that employees can use to more effectively manage stress. People who use active coping strategies are attempting to change the source of stress or themselves. In contrast, persons who use inactive coping strategies avoid or deny the source of stress. Active coping strategies are considerably more effective in managing stress.

- Direct active strategies: When teachers use direct active coping strategies, they directly intervene with the source of the stress in a way that minimizes the stressful situation.
- Indirect active strategies: When teachers use indirect active coping strategies, they attempt to reduce their stress by releasing it or engaging in activities known to reduce stress. They do not, however, attempt to change the source of the stress.

### **Other Research Studies**

Other researchers in the arena of stress have conducted research to further the knowledge and application of coping. In an interesting research by Kausar and Powell (1996), the coping levels and psychological distress experienced by care givers was examined, in relation to the post-onset personality and physical changes in patients with neurological disorders. The participants of the study were 112 carers (either a close relative or a friend) of patients. Coping was assessed using the "Ways of Coping Questionnaire". It was found that carers experienced an enormous amount of psychological distress. Those carers who were more dependent on emotion-focused coping styles reported greater distress as compared to those who depended more on problem-focused strategies.

Nes and Segerstrom (2006) in their meta-analytic review about the relation between dispositional optimism and coping, found 169 articles reporting research on these topics in just two decades from 1985- 2006. According to the authors, coping has been cited as a reason why optimism is associated with better adjustment during stress. The authors cite that although there are many specific coping strategies, researchers have typically conceptualized coping using one of two distinctions: (a) problem focus (addressing external demands of stressors) versus emotion focus (addressing internal demands of stressors; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and (b) approach (acting on the demands of a stressor) versus avoidance (avoiding or disengaging from the demands of a stressor; Suls & Fletcher, 1985).

The review of the research findings has important implications from the point of view of understanding the application of coping in different stress situations. We review if the coping strategies can be developed, and what is the application of different strategies at different times and if at all these can be 'learned'.



## **DEVELOPING PERSONAL COPING STRATEGIES**

As we had reviewed earlier in this chapter teachers experience high levels of stress at work, and it would be well-advised for them to develop strategies to cope with stress in their teaching role and personal lives. But the question arises whether the coping strategies can be developed?

Researchers have established that effective coping strategies reduce workplace related stress and various interventions can be used to enhance the coping behaviour of individuals. An extensive range of “strategies to reduce stress” now exists. A search on the internet with this term gives a wide range of solutions. For instance the Google search got 2,890,000 results! From layman solutions to academic researches, evidence exists that “strategies” to enhance coping with stress can be developed.

Some research based evidence for coping strategies is presented herewith. Brown and Uehara (1999) highlighted that development of situational coping strategies is a major component of successful stress-prevention program. Participants are trained in strategies that help them either change their reaction to specific stressful situations or alter their work environment. The participants learn various coping strategies such as:

- Assertiveness techniques
- Tools for enlisting the cooperation of others
- Skills for changing a stressful situation

Research in the field of education explains how different strategies can be developed to enhance coping. For instance, common planning time supports an interactive work life for teachers. When teaming is practiced well, it has an impact on teachers' perceptions of their jobs. In a study of 769 middle school teachers on ninety-nine teams, Steffes and Valentine (1996) found several teaming practices to be related to positive teacher outcomes: input into team member selection, flexible scheduling, adjacent classrooms, autonomy and decision-making opportunities, in-service related to teaming, and common planning time.

An important aspect of enhancing coping skills is the process of self empowerment. When teachers are empowered as agents for change, they become "active agents rather than passive workers" (Feimen-Nemser, & Floden, 1986). Once individuals participate energetically, share authority, and engage in meaningful work, they begin to shed most negative emotions and to demonstrate their knowledge (Shore, 1992). Thus, it is vital that teachers be recognized

as valued contributors to the implementation of innovative practices to deal with their own work demands and lead to self improvement.

However, in an interesting observation Pines and Aronson (1988) highlight that implementing strategies to improve coping among teachers are not sufficient. They mention that district and school administrators, however, are ultimately responsible for reducing stress in the school environment. Expecting teachers to better manage their stress in an unsupportive environment is an ineffective way of dealing with stress.

The scope of discussion on coping strategies is rather extensive however one can summarize some of the main findings. It may be noted that effective coping strategies can be developed to deal with stress and its outcomes. The particular type of coping strategy that an individual may employ is determined by the stress situation and also his personality type. Another important tool that can lead to change in coping behaviour is through 'cognitive restructuring'. The following section gives an insight to this theory.

### **Cognitive Restructuring**

In the coping research, 'cognitive restructuring' is a useful tool for understanding and turning around negative thinking. The theory of Cognitive Restructuring has provided the knowledge base to this research as we find that coping behaviour can be evolved and changes can be wrought in an individual through intervention of his cognitive process.

'Cognitive Restructuring' according to Seaward (1999), means changing a perception from a negative interpretation to a neutral or positive one, making it less stressful. Cognitive restructuring helps us evaluate how rational and valid these interpretations are. Where we find that these assumptions and interpretations are incorrect, then this naturally changes the way we think about situations and changes our moods. The cognitive restructuring theory holds that your own unrealistic beliefs are directly responsible for generating dysfunctional emotions and their resultant behaviors, like stress, depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal, and that we humans can be rid of such emotions and their effects by dismantling the beliefs that give them life. Cognitive restructuring then advises to change such irrational beliefs and substitute more rational ones.

Cognitive restructuring leads to better coping skills through therapy that teaches clients adaptive responses-both cognitive and overt behavioral-to deal effectively with difficult situations they encounter.

The current research is not based on implementing the above theory but rather found supporting evidence to evolve an action research based project to help teachers recognize and analyze their own behaviour and develop strategies to cope with stress of their work situations.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF COPING FOR THIS STUDY**

In the final section on coping we will review the implications of coping for the current research project. Coping is the important link in the relationship between work stress and the job well-being. An individual who is able to cope effectively with work stress reports positive feelings of job well-being.

To comprehend the importance of coping in the current research it is essential to understand that enhancing feelings of job well-being among teachers is one of the desired objectives of the research. The path to attaining the objective is through augmentation of coping strategies to deal effectively with work stress.

To share and highlight the link of coping with stress I would like to share some researches. Researches reveal high experience of stress among teachers and also that the extreme reactions to stress lead to the phenomenon of "burnout" among teachers. Cherniss (1980), one of the pioneers in describing burnout suggested that individuals who fail to successfully cope with stress are considered to adopt inappropriate coping strategies such as avoidance or resignation and therefore are more vulnerable to developing burnout.

Hoyos and Kallus (2005), in their research about burnout risk factors, stress recovery and coping among Austrian teachers, have reported that literature review indicates that teachers are being classified as having higher burnout risks due to faulty coping mechanisms. Barth (1992), studied burnout among German teachers examined the impact of different coping styles by using data of 122 teachers. Teachers who tended to resignation or to escape stressful situations felt more exhausted, less efficient and depersonalised in a stronger way. Defensive strategies such as avoidance or denial were significantly correlated with burnout.

In another study Buschman and Gamsjäger (1999) examined determinants of teacher burnout by studying the epidemiology and causes of burnout. Observing a sample of 622

teachers, results demonstrated burnout's nature to be based on frustration as a conflict of values and existential vacuum. Active coping skills are considered necessary for preventing the syndrome among teachers.

An additional aspect is that as mentioned by Gulwadi (2006), schoolteachers' environments have not yet been studied comprehensively to find out how they support or constrain teachers' efforts to cope with sources of stress in their daily lives.

Thus, as the review of literature and research evidence indicates, "coping" forms an important aspect of how an individual deals with the demands and stresses of life. In the current research, the concept of 'coping' had three important implications:

1. It was an important concept to be understood in the interaction between the work demands and the job well-being of the teachers who are working in the challenging environment of international schools.

2. The research aimed to contribute to the "applied behavioral" science interest by using action research to help the teachers improve their coping strategies.

3. The aim to enhance the "coping" was the important link in the current research between the knowledge and its application.

Now, to implement the research objective, a technique was required. The action research technique was assessed as the most suitable one for obtaining the research objectives. The following section of this chapter goes on to provide an insight into the choice of research method for the study- the action research method.

## **THE ACTION RESEARCH METHOD**

The "action research" methodology was used to achieve the research objectives of the current study. This qualitative method is of great significance to an applied behavioural scientist. The following section gives an overview to the theoretical concept of action research, leading to its application in the research study.

Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist, was one of the first pioneers of action research. A German social and experimental psychologist, and one of the founders of the Gestalt school, he was concerned with social problems, and focused on participative group processes for addressing conflict, crises, and change, generally within organizations. He felt that people

should be involved in their own enquiries about their own lives. His work (Lewin, 1940) focused on social issues. His main interest was to encourage people, through a process of collaboration, to look to themselves to identify problems and overcome difficulties.

After the ground breaking research by Lewin other researchers went on to work in this area of action research and have provided further meaning to this wonderful technique.

According to Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1982), the linking of the terms 'action' and 'research' highlights the essential feature of the method: trying out ideas in practice as means of improvement and as a means of increasing knowledge.

Carr and Kemmis (1986) provide a classic definition to understanding this: "*Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out*".

According to McCutcheon and Jung (1990), action research is a systematic form of inquiry that is collective, collaborative, self-reflective, critical, and undertaken by the participants of the inquiry. Action research, sometimes called "practitioner research," is a reflective investigation of a personal interest, problem or challenge. The process begins with the development of questions, which may be answered by the collection of data. Action implies that the practitioner will be acting as the collector of data, the analyst, and the interpreter of results.

### **Salient Features**

Action research is used in real situations, rather than in contrived, experimental studies, since its primary focus is on solving real problems. Mostly, though, in accordance with its principles, it is chosen when circumstances require flexibility, the involvement of the people in the research, or change must take place quickly or holistically. The main features of action research (AR) according to Mills (2003) are:

1. AR is participatory and democratic
2. AR is socially responsive
3. AR helps participants to examine their everyday practices.
4. Knowledge gained through AR can help in liberating and enhancing the professional development.

The current study endeavoured to use action research as the means of helping teachers to cope better with their work demands and hence improve their job well-being. The prerequisite for selecting action research as the method of enquiry for this research lies in the basic features of this method, which according to James and Connolly (2000) are the "three I's" of intervention, involvement and improvement. Applied to this research, the researcher used 'intervention' by action research method for better coping, by the 'involvement' of the teachers, and to lead towards an 'improvement' in their job wellbeing.

The following section discusses the process of action research to give a concise picture of what it actually involves.

### **THE ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS**

The action research process is cyclical in its essence. Kurt Lewin in the mid 1940s constructed a theory of action research which described action research as "proceeding in a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of planning, action and the evaluation of the result of action" (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1990). Having confronted a difficulty, the action plan is implemented, observed and reflected on; further evaluation would occur and a second cycle implemented, if necessary. These stages can be seen as a basis for many of the more modern models of action research (Kemmis and Mc Taggart, 1982; McNiff, 1988; Elliott 1991).

To understand the cyclical nature of action research, we go on to study one such model given by Kemmis and McTaggart (1982). As defined by the authors, action research is systematic and reflective model, which consists of four phases that take place in a cycle. These four phases are: *planning, acting, observing and reflecting*.

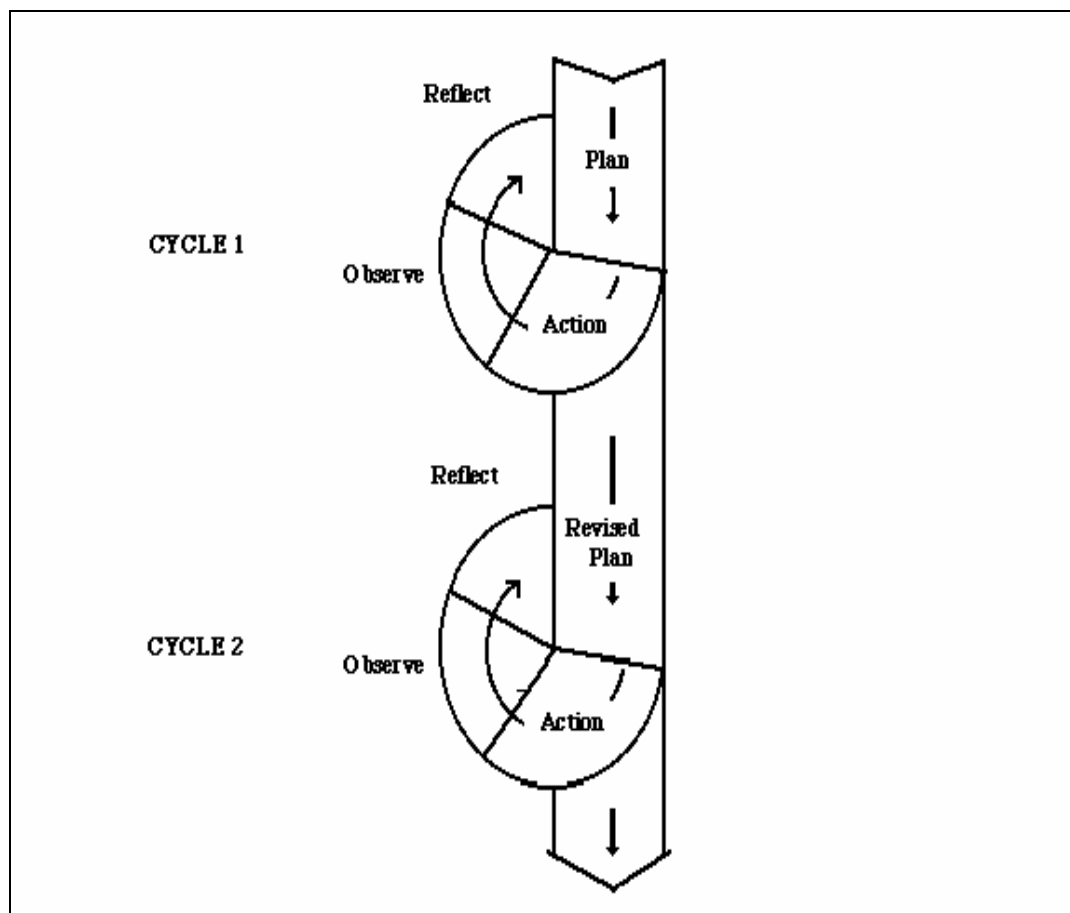
*Planning* - all the members of the research team question 'what are' the realities of their particular practices, and begin to search for "what ought to be?"

*Acting* - the researchers implement the plan they have collaboratively developed, addressing all or a particular set of problems or issues.

*Observing* - simultaneous with action is the collection of data. Observation is important for subsequent reflection and action. Various observation methods can be used.

*Reflecting* - the researchers reflect upon what is happening with their project, developing revised action plans based upon new questions that may arise and what they are learning from the process of planning, acting, and observing.

The simple model (Figure 2) developed by Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1982) was of cyclical nature as is typical of action research process. Each cycle has four steps: plan, act, observe, and reflect.



**Figure 2** The Cyclical Nature of Action Research Model

This model with its four stages in each cycle was used as the procedural foundation by the researcher for the study.

### **MODES OF ACTION RESEARCH**

Given the assortment of influences that have shaped action research and the resultant breadth of action, it is not surprising that several typologies have been devised in an attempt to formally classify approaches and activity. These 'types' of action research do not differ in the research methods used to collect and analyse data, but in the purposes of the research, and the social and power relationships between the actors and researchers. There is a continuum

of participation across the three types, from the differentiated roles and recognition of the researcher as expert in technical action research to the highly participative and shared roles of empowering research.

Grundy (1988) discusses three modes of action research: technical, practical, and emancipatory. Holter and Schwartz-Barcott (1993) also discuss three types of action research, that of a technical collaborative approach, a mutual collaborative approach and an enhancement approach. McKernan (1991) also lists three types of action research as:

Type 1: the scientific-technical view of problem solving;

Type 2: practical-deliberative action research; and

Type 3: critical-emancipatory action research.

These 3 broad 'types' of action research that have been identified in the literature are extending on a continuum and can be described as:

**Type 1:** 'Technical Scientific & Positivist Action Research'. The underlying goal of the researcher in this approach is to test a particular intervention based on a pre-specified theoretical framework, the nature of the collaboration between the researcher and the practitioner is technical and facilitatory.

**Type 2:** 'Practical Deliberative / Mutual-Collaborative & Interpretivist Action Research'. In this form of action research, policy makers, researchers and field practitioners are perceived to come together within the context of the research to identify potential problems, their possible nature and a range of likely interventions, with the assumption that in an ideal situation of unimpaired communication and some form of consensus can be reached.

**Type 3:** 'Critical and emancipatory action research'. There are two goals for the researcher using this approach, one is to increase the closeness between the actual problems encountered by practitioners in a specific setting and the theory used to explain and resolve the problem. The second goal, which goes beyond the other two approaches, is to assist practitioners in identifying and making explicit fundamental problems by raising their collective consciousness (Holter et. al., 1993).

These different types of inquiry in action research have been summarized and depicted concisely in a tabular form by Carr and Kemmis (1986). They have been differentiated



on the basis of aims, facilitator's role and also the relationship between facilitator and participants and represented in the table 3.

**Table 1** Types of Inquiry in Action Research

Type of inquiry	Aims	Facilitator's role	Relationship between facilitator and participants
1. Technical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- effectiveness/ efficiency of practice</li> <li>- professional development</li> </ul>	outside 'expert'	co-option (practitioners depend on facilitator)
2. Practical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- as (1) above</li> <li>- practitioners' understanding</li> <li>- transformation of their consciousness</li> </ul>	Socratic role, encouraging participation and self-reflection	co-operation (process-consultancy)
3. Emancipatory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- as (1) and (2) above</li> <li>- participants' emancipation from the dictates of tradition, self-deception, coercion</li> <li>- their critique of bureaucratic systematization</li> <li>- transformation of the organization or system</li> </ul>	process moderator (responsibility shared equally by participants)	collaboration

As the field of action research grows in application, various "types" of related terms have also grown. In recent times, application of action research has led to the emergence of "Participatory action research" or "PAR" as it is commonly known. PAR has emerged in recent years as a significant methodology for intervention, development and change within communities and groups. It is now promoted and implemented by many international development agencies and university program as well as countless local community organizations around the world. As explained by McNiff (2002), "Participatory action research is a recognized form of experimental research that focuses on the effects of the researcher's

direct actions of practice within a participatory community with the goal of improving the performance quality of the community or an area of concern.”

At this stage one may mention that though this research was difficult to be categorized typically in to a ‘type’ or call it “PAR” since the research problem, though experienced by the participants, was brought in to focus by the researcher. Also the scope of implementing the research based findings and bring about an actual change in participants’ life was limited due to time constraint. However, the research perspective matched with the ‘Type 2’ (table 1) kind of action research. As the researcher was the person responsible for implementing the project at the school for teachers, she had to actively collaborate with the school management and the teacher participants. As we will review in chapter 4, when this research got converted to an action based “project” for implementation at the school, the research objectives underwent modifications as suggested by the management and later on by the teachers. Its scope was widened and there were “collaborative” suggestions that kept getting implemented in to the research cycles.

### **ACTION RESEARCH IN EDUCATION**

Action research has been used in a wide range of disciplines but it has been specially applied in the field of education. The current research does not have a direct application to improving any educational practice but it has an indirect application to the educational field as it aims to improve the job wellbeing of teachers who are imparting international education. Researchers such as Kemmis (1982), and Elliott (1991) developed their ideas on Lewin’s concepts of action research and applied them to education. The argument that Whitehead (1993) makes is that action research must be educational and help teachers make sense of their everyday practice. Action research involves action which links back into the situation and can lead in unforeseen directions. These actions are then followed up because it seems to the practitioner at the time to be worth following. Therefore action research is to do with discovering hypotheses and ideas as well as with trying to test them. One major problem for busy teachers with this is the amount of time required to discuss and research the next move as the research develops.

Action Research represents a growing field of educational research whose chief identifying characteristic is the recognition of the pragmatic requirements of educational

practitioners for organized reflective inquiry into classroom instruction. Action Research is a process designed to empower all participants in the educational process (students, instructors and other parties) with the means to improve the practices conducted within the educational experience (Hopkins, 1993).

The management of an educational research situation, following the empiricist tradition, is geared towards answering the questions of the external researcher, rather than those of the teacher.

According to Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1982), the main features of the action research method in educational settings are:

1. Commitment to educational improvement
2. A special kind of research question answered
3. A special kind of action that is informed, committed and intentional
4. Authentic description of action
5. Explanations of action
6. Validating claims made thereof
7. Making action research public.

The current research was based in the educational settings as it investigated how teachers could be empowered to cope better with their work demands. The research evidence to support the use of the action research technique is reviewed in the next section.

### **Research Evidence for Action Research in Education**

A review of choosing a specific research method for a research indicates that the action research technique can be applied in various situations. Action research, especially collaborative action research, can be very powerful in achieving organizational change. As a mode of enquiry, action research covers a broad range of approaches. In essence, action research involves the researcher working on a matter that is of genuine concern to the individual and/or organization.

Action research has been used for various purposes in the field of education. The following section provides evidence to show how action research methodology can be converted to research based investigation.

For instance in their research paper Stoer and Cortesa (2001) stated that the teachers, on the basis of action-research methodology, can produce two types of scientific knowledge: one based on the teacher as researcher (the teacher as ethnographer), and another based on the development of pedagogic action (the teacher as educator).

Educational researchers have found that the action research process effectively promotes skills of inquiry, reflection, problem solving, and action (Casanova, 1989; McCutcheon, 1987; Rosaen & Schram, 1997).

Action research is also used in many teacher education programs to promote skills of inquiry and reflection in teachers (Arnold, 1993; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Friesen, 1995; Fueyo & Neves, 1995).

Teacher educators who are involved in doing action research with pre-service and/or inservice teachers find that teachers become more reflective, critical, and analytical about their own teaching behaviors in the classroom (Keating, Rosario, Diaz-Greenberg, Baldwin, and Thousand, 1998; Schnorr & Painter, 1999).

The action research method is not limited to a specific field as it provides an organized reflective inquiry into any practice and may be used to produce 'action' along with 'research'. However this review emphasizes the importance and practice of action research in the educational settings, and served as the evidence for the researcher to its selection for the research study.

## **CHOOSING ACTION RESEARCH**

The choice of an action research approach for the current research was based on the need for "action" based research intention to help international school teachers to improve their coping with the work demands and hence lead to their improved job related well-being. This method was provided the tool for attaining the research objectives.

There have been various reasons guiding the choice of the action research method for this study, some of the main being -

1. It provided the tool to facilitate teachers' personal development in the actual work settings of the international school.

2. The action research allowed for a collaborative method of improving the personal development in teachers by their active involvement. The methodology adopted also

provided for active collaboration of the school management for the implementation of the project.

3. The action research technique contributed to more than just self- development because as the teachers learned to cope better with work demands, they were 'learning by doing', thus creating awareness which would have lasting effects.

4. The research had aimed to have beneficial impacts on both the teachers and the school improvement as the results were shared with the school management and some of the recommendations were implemented during the course of the project implementation too.

5. For the researcher, it provided an excellent opportunity to put into practice the knowledge accrued from previous research and the experience of working in an international school. The action research project provided the link of research to application or "action" and vice versa.

As this research intended to produce evidence for the improvement of personal development of the teachers, the choice of methodology was quite deliberate so as to lead towards this change and betterment of the school and the society at large.

With this literature review we go on to the next chapter that describes how the action research methodology was implemented, the research design, the research plan and the procedure of project implementation.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes and deals with the issues of planning, methodology and implementation of the research. This research was planned within the perspective of action research, with the objective to enhance coping skills among international school teachers (in Bangkok) so as to mitigate the impact of work related problems, and lead to their improved job well-being. This chapter gives the description of how the research was planned and implemented. Details are provided about the design of the study, the research questions and the action research plan, developing the research map, the school background, selecting the participants, the procedure followed, the data collection process and the data analysis procedure.

#### **DESIGN OF STUDY**

The design of this study was evolved using the action research approach to facilitate teachers to improve their feelings of job well-being through actively learning to cope better with their work demands.

Following the cyclical form of the action research method, the research focused on four related components: (1) recognizing feelings and reactions to work stress; (2) clarifying feelings in stress situations; (3) developing a strategic coping plan (for example, modifying anxious self-talk into coping self-talk, or determining what coping actions might be effective); and (4) evaluating the strategic coping plan through regular study and review.

This type of methodology uses a participatory and deliberate approach, which implies collaboratively identifying the problems, needs, underlying causes and possible interventions among the researcher and respondents. Hence the researcher collaborated with the teachers to identify the effective coping strategies for enhancing their job well-being.

Based on the action research postulate, the study was divided into cyclical investigations. In implementing the research, four cycles were under taken till the saturation point was obtained in terms of information to be obtained from the research.

The following sections discuss the methodology used in the research through an understanding of the *research questions, the action research plan, the considerations for action planning, developing the research map, the background information of participants, the procedure, and the data collection issues and techniques and the analysis of the data.*

## **THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research questions that were needed to be addressed through this research were derived from the research objectives. To provide clarity to the reader, the main research questions to be focused through this research were:

1. Can we create awareness among the international school teachers to identify the negative impacts of stressful work demands among and the need to cope effectively with them?
2. Can this action based research help to enhance the coping skills of teachers with the focus on developing individual as the resource for coping?
3. Can action research based learning evolve recommendations for effective coping among teachers of an international school, and lead to an increase in their job well-being?

## **DEVELOPING THE ACTION RESEARCH PLAN**

Planning for this research was a crucial part and like the blueprint for building this research study. The plan for conducting this action research study was guided by the review of literature. The final action plan was developed before the research commenced and it was an amalgamation of this research's objectives and the theoretical underpinnings of conducting an action research.

The researcher has tried to clarify her thought process by giving details of what were the considerations guiding the action plan for this research and how these lead to developing the research map.

### **The Considerations for Action Planning**

Before the actual study based project was started, it was important to make an action plan. Action research specialists strongly recommend that the first step towards successfully

conducting action research is to generate an action plan and a number of guides to action plans are available in the literature (McNiff et. al., 1996). The guidelines for action plan that have grown in popularity around the world are based on the one developed by Jack Whitehead (1989). Expressing his views on action planning, the author says: *“The aim is to encourage the practitioner, to ask critical questions about his own practice, and find the answers for himself. No one else can give the answers. Other people can comment and advise, but only you can say what is right for him and his situation. It could be that there are no answers to your particular issue, but the process of asking questions is as important as finding answers”*.

To elucidate the action research planning the researcher tried to answer the questions, which are the modified version of Jack Whitehead’s (1989) guide to the action plan and are addressed in first person. The questions and their answers from the researcher are illustrated to show the planning process before the research.

1. What issue am I interested in researching?

Answer: The issue was the need to cope with the high level of work demands of international school teachers and help enhance their job well-being.

2. Why do I want to research this issue?

Answer: The need to research this issue was evolved due to various reasons such as enumerated below:

i) Literature review indicating that international school teachers face high levels of work stress.

ii) Results of my previous research study (Mohan, 2007), that showed that job well being of teachers is significantly affected by perceived work stress.

iii) My area of work that has given me a first-hand insight into the experience of stress by international school teachers.

iv) The need to address this problem of coping better with work stress so as to contribute to the applied interest in behavior science research.

3. What kind of evidence can I gather to show why I am interested in this issue?

Answer: Based on the research objectives I decided to gather qualitative information from the international school teachers to validate the need to address this issue.



4. What can I do? What will I do?

Answer: I developed an action research approach to create awareness among the participants (international school teachers) to cope better with their work related demands. I designed an action research based project wherein teachers will learn to cope better by their active participation in the process.

5. What kind of evidence can I gather to show that I am having an influence?

Answer: I gathered information about the impact of the action research plan through teachers' interviews and feedbacks. I shared their feedbacks with the school head and management and saw that they were eager to put into practice some of the feedbacks to improve the school.

6. How can I explain that influence?

Answer: The influence of the action research plan can be inferred through the analysis of the information obtained during the implementation of action research cycles.

7. How can I ensure that any judgments I might make are reasonably fair and accurate?

Answer: To ensure fair judgments, the researcher will use the criterion mentioned in the planning stage to review and cross check, share the feedbacks with the three participating groups of the school teachers and also the management and the principal of the school.

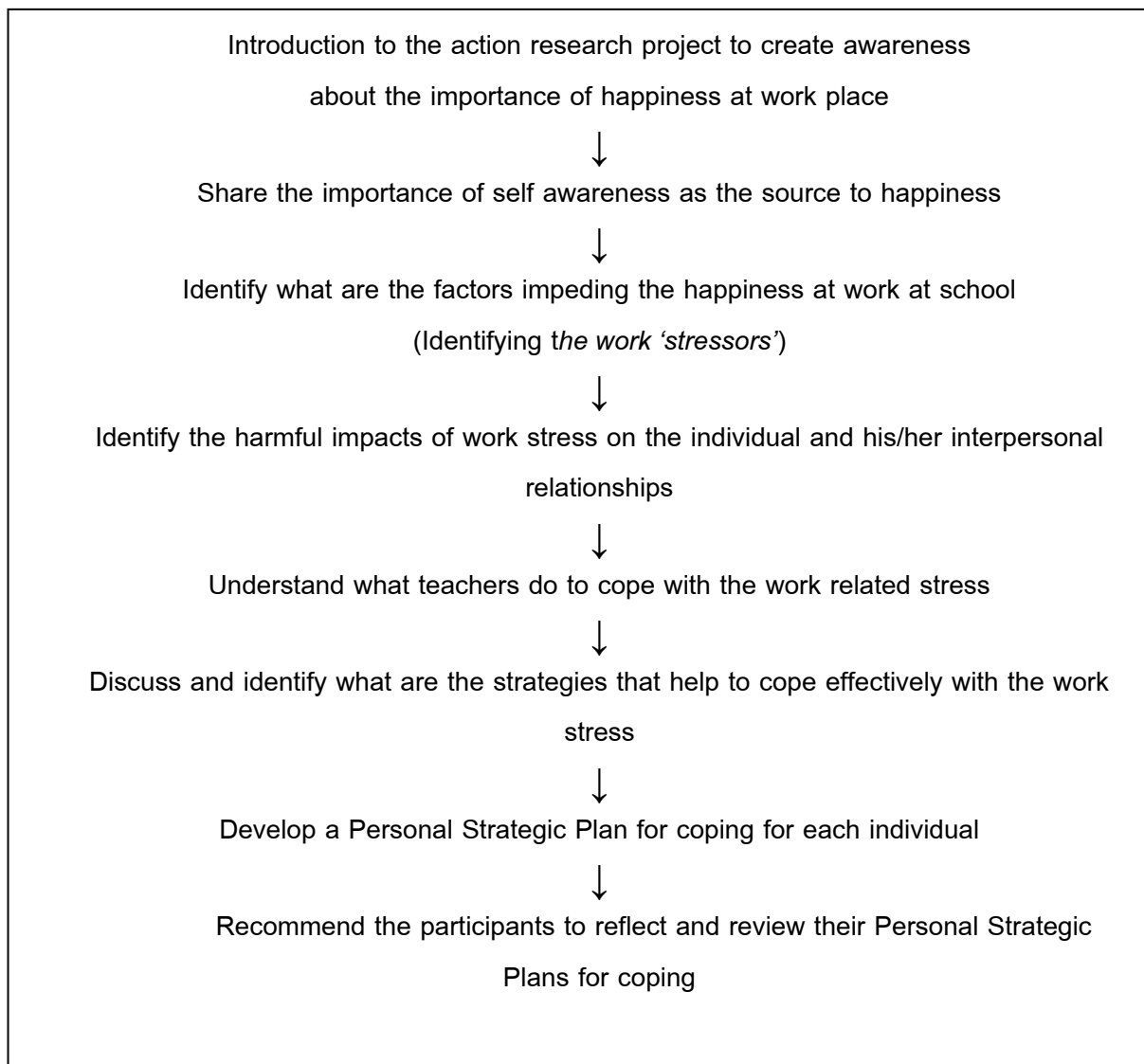
8. What will I do in the light of my evaluation?

Answer: Plan was made to regularly review and analyze the information obtained from the participants and share it with them to confirm, then modify (if required) the direction of my research, and carry on the research till information obtained is saturated. Based on the information from the research cycles, the researcher will evolve recommendations for enhancing coping strategies that would lead to improvement in the job well-being of teachers. The relevant information would also be shared with the school management and principal.

The process of answering the above guided questions helped the researcher to clarify the thought progression. Based on these guidelines the research map of the study was developed.

## DEVELOPING THE RESEARCH MAP

Before the project was implemented at the school with teachers, a flow chart or research map was made to clarify the actions to be taken to obtain the objectives of research. The activities under taken in the project were based on the action research methodology and formed a cyclical pattern of investigation. However, this may represent the steps taken as the flow of activities, which are shown in the research map in figure 3. This research map detailed all the steps required to fulfil the project objectives.



**Figure 3** The Research Map

In implementing the project, a cyclical form of investigation was carried out and the activities were reviewed, revised and implemented. For instance in developing the personal coping plan the participants discussed what coping strategy they used, reviewed what coping strategies may be more effective for them and finally modified and evolved their coping plan. This was not the end as they were asked to continue the process of plan-act-observe-reflect for their effective coping behaviour.

Once the plan and the map were ready, this chapter goes on to provide the background information about the participants and the school that they worked in.

## **THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL CONTEXT**

To have a lucid understanding about the research context, the background information about the international school in which the research was implemented is shared.

### **School Background**

This research was conducted at an international school in Bangkok, Thailand. This school was established over ten years ago. The basic purpose of this school was to provide best quality of international education within a reasonable fee structure. Based on this, the school fee has been on a very reasonable end as compared to other high end international schools in Thailand. Hence it caters largely to students coming from middle income group of expatriates.

### **School Management**

The school is governed by a management committee which is answerable to a religious organization based in Thailand. It is an off shoot of the religious organization. The school's management committee is elected for a period of two years. This leads to a change in the management of school rather frequently. Each set of members of the management have so far brought changes in the way school is run, its vision and even policies. Within the last ten years there have been three new principals of the school, with each one leading the school in a different direction. This change causes a lot of perceived insecurity amongst the school community as there are no set guidelines along which the school governance works. This basic turbulence in the school climate has formed the basis for a methodological understanding and support of the teachers' job well-being.

### School community

The school is managed by the management representative and the school principal. The school employs academic and administrative staff. The administrative team (approximately 12-14 persons) takes care of the administrative chores.

Further the academic school is divided in to three sections- the kindergarten, elementary and the secondary. Each section has a section head to coordinate their activities. Teachers in a particular section report to the section head. Each school section has same school timings but separate schedules, breaks and activities during the day.

### Curriculum

The school follows the British National curriculum and teaches children from the kindergarten to class10. The children of class 10 take the British O' level examinations at the age of 16-17 years.

### Student Community

There are around five hundred students in the school, predominantly Asians. They belong to different cultural background. A large percentage, around 40% are of Indian nationality. The next majority is from Thailand. Other students are from Philippines, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and a few are from Britain, and America.

### Teacher Community

There have been around 60-65 teachers working at the school in a given school year. The teachers are mainly Asian, a large number from India, then Thailand and Philippines. The teachers are well qualified and experienced. The Thai Ministry of Education requires an international school teacher to hold a basic degree in education. Some of the teachers also hold masters degree in specialised subjects.

About 35% of the teachers had worked in the school for over 5 years. Out of the total number, around 80% were expatriate teachers. Having a large number of expat teachers leads to a frequent turnover in staff too. Among the teachers, 25% were males and 75% were females.

The teachers work in three school sections, with 12 in kindergarten, 25 in elementary school and 27 in secondary school. These numbers vary during the year as some of the teachers leave and new ones join in the school term.

The teachers in each section share a staff room and lunch hours, and are free to mingle among themselves in their sections. Usually each section is separated by their work schedules. But all have the same school calendar and holidays.

#### Infrastructure and Facilities

The school is located in central Bangkok and is very accessible. It provides basic and good facilities required from an international school like air conditioned class rooms, computer laboratories, science laboratories, transport facilities, food, swimming pool, and sports grounds.

Thus, this was a medium scale school in terms of the number of students who studied here. Its fee structure is reasonable as compared to other schools in Bangkok. The culture in the school is rather turbulent due to the changing school management. It has the basic infrastructure and the staff to handle the expectations but lacks a clear vision for school growth and development. Thus, it is rather a challenge for teachers to work here. However since it's a small community, there is a bonding between the teachers that forms a source of social support.

## **THE PARTICIPANTS**

The participants for the study were twelve teachers working in an international school in Bangkok, Thailand. The research was launched as a project at this school. The over view and objectives of the project were shared with all the sixty teachers working in the school. They were invited to join the action research process on a voluntary basis. Initially sixteen teachers joined the project, but later four dropped out due to various personal reasons. As the project coordinator, the researcher went to each one of them to enquire about their absence, and encourage them to join. One left since she had got additional administrative responsibility at school. Two left because of heavy work load as they were preparing class 10 students to take O' level British National examinations. One left without giving any clear reason for it.

Finally twelve teachers actively participated actively in the project. They represented all the three sections of the school, the kindergarten, the elementary, and the secondary. More details are provided in the next chapter.

## THE PROCEDURE

The procedure for carrying out the research is elaborated in the following section. The process of the action research was initiated through a presentation organized by the school head along with the researcher for sharing the information about the “project” (as it was called at this school). All the teachers working in this international school were present at this occasion. As the project manager, the researcher gave an overview about the project objectives, procedures and desired outcomes to all the teachers.

Teachers were then invited to join the project on a voluntary basis. Twelve teachers actively participated in the project. An introductory meeting was held for all participants. Details about project were shared with them such as the project objectives, methods and schedules. At the end of this initial meeting with all the teachers participating in the project, the teachers from each section of the school (kindergarten, elementary and secondary) decided to meet in their section groups. They discussed about the next meeting schedule and decided to meet separately in three section groups due to ease in finding a common time together as each section has different schedules/ time tables for the working day.

A time schedule for the first set of meetings was decided. A series of workshops was organized by the researcher to meet participants and implement the project. The action research cycles were initiated during these workshops. Four cycles of action research were completed. Each cycle followed the procedure of “plan-act-observe- reflect”. The group members shared their feelings and suggestions during the course of these ‘group discussions’.

Individual feedback questionnaires and ‘individual reflection journals’ were given to each group teacher to record his/her feelings about the process. The journal involved writing an individual feedback each day during the process of implementing this project.

During this period in implementing the action research cycles, personal Interviews were also taken by the researcher to encourage the teachers to carry on with their participation and implementing their plans as well as take their feedbacks. The personal interview was directed towards gathering information about the feelings about the project, their coping plans, any feedbacks and suggestions. Teachers were also allowed the access to the researcher to come and discuss any personal issues related to their job well-being or share any other feelings.

At the end of the cycle, each group met the researcher. Through group discussions the participants shared their feelings and experience of developing their coping plan. Any modifications required were incorporated in their coping plan and the participants were asked to continue their self reflections and implementing the coping plans. Thus, four cycles were carried out. The whole process took about three months for implementation.

Thus, each individual teacher and the groups continued the action research based cycles till they reached a point of developing their strategic coping plan. Also through these discussions emerged recommendations that were shared with the school management for their consideration and implementation.

## DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected over a period of three months for this research. This section covers the various aspect of data collection in the dimensions of sources of data, the method used, the techniques employed, the issue of maintaining rigor in research and upholding of the research ethics.

The data was collected during the period of implementing the project at the school. The table 2 gives an overview to this section.

**Table 2** The Data Collection Process

Sources of Data	Method	Techniques	Rigor	Ethics
1 Participants	1 The research schedule	1 Group discussions	1 Credibility	1 Informed consents
2 Documents		2 Questionnaires	2 Transferability	2 Honesty
3 Environment	2 Time Frame	3 Reflection journals	3 Dependability	3 Information Sharing
		4 Interviews	4 Confirmability	
		5 Voice recordings		
		6 Researcher's reflections		

## **1. SOURCES OF DATA**

The sources of data entail how the information was collected from the participants, the documents used and the environment in which it was gathered.

### **The Participants**

The sources of obtaining information during the action research were basically two:

1. The twelve teacher participants who represented the three different sections of the school: three from kindergarten, five from elementary and four from the secondary.
2. The School Principal and the Management Representative who were both consulted and the feedback shared that was emerging from the action research project implemented with the teachers.

### **Documents**

Various documents were used to collect and disseminate information during the course of the project. The documents that were used are attached in the appendix and were:

1. The teacher forms (called TF): Forms were designed to elicit information from the teachers during the 4 action research cycles.

- 1.1 TF1 was used to get the demographic and preliminary information from the teachers at the beginning of the action research cycles.

- 1.2 TF2 was used to record feedback from the teacher at the end of cycle 1 and to be shared during cycle 2.

- 1.3 TF3 was used during the cycle 3 to stimulate participants to think about their personal coping plans.

2. The reflection journal forms (called the RF) for participant teachers were used for them to reflect and record their feelings and observations during the action cycles.

- 2.1 RF1 was used to record their daily observations about the experience of stress during the first cycle.

- 2.2 RF 2 was used during the second cycle for participants to reflect on coping strategies and stimulate their thinking about the school improvement.

- 2.3 RF 3 was used in the third cycle to support the efforts of the participants to continue to reflect strategically on the coping plans.



2.4 RF 4 was used in the last cycle of the research to support the teachers to think and review their strategic planning for enhancing coping.

3. The Researcher's reflections were noted regularly on forms created for this purpose. After each cycle the researcher reviewed and noted down her reflections.

### **Environment**

The environmental background to the collection of data was in the premises of the international school. This international school is located in Bangkok, Thailand and employed almost sixty teachers of various nationalities. The school follows the British curriculum and caters to a diverse group of over 500 students. Since the researcher was also employed at this school she was familiar with the work environment and in good working terms with the participants. In fact as she was in charge of the human resources department, she was acquainted with all the participants and they were comfortable with her. The workshops and interviews with the participants were held in the school's premises, some times in the office of the researcher. Efforts were made to make the participants comfortable for the meetings and the schedules of the meetings/interviews were adjusted according to the participant availability.

## **2. METHOD**

### **2.1 The Research Schedule**

The entire research process has spanned over 4 years. Building up from the earlier research studies of the researcher, assimilating with her work experience along with literature review, this research design was built up.

The first phase of the research activity involved a review of relevant literature and building up of the proposal. During this time the researcher also conducted her quantitative study (Mohan, 2007) on international school teachers in Bangkok.

In the next phase proposal was finalized for the current research. During this time the researcher was working at the international school.

After this was the actual implementation of the research based project at the international school. It took three months of action research process to implement the research objectives at this international school. This was followed by the data analyses and report writing.

A summarized version of the total research schedule is depicted in table 3.

**Table 3** The Research Schedule

<b>Research Activity</b>	<b>Time Taken</b>
<i>Phase 1: Project preparation- literature review</i>	2½ years
<i>Phase 2: The Proposal finalization</i>	1 year
<i>Phase 3: The Project implementation</i>	1 year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Getting approval from school to implement the research project</li> </ul>	2 months
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Implementing the project</li> </ul>	3 months
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reviewing</li> </ul>	2 months
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Analysing information and the project findings</li> </ul>	3 months
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Finalising the report for the school management</li> </ul>	1 month
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Thesis writing</li> </ul>	6 months

## 2.2 Time Frame

The time frame for the implementation of the action research cycles of the project took around three months from the month of February 2008. At the planning stage each cycle was given around 2 weeks for implementation. At the implementation stage, cycle one took 2 weeks, cycles 2 and 3 took 3 weeks each, and the last cycle took 4 weeks. This variance in planning and implementation occurred due to the unscheduled activities and events at school which postponed the participant meetings. As school work is of primary importance, this delay has to be accepted in this research.

It must be mentioned that at the planning stage the research schedule was shared with the school management, the principal and also with the participant teachers.

## 3. TECHNIQUES

A triangulation of methods was employed to collect information from participants over the implementation of various cycles of the action research project.

Triangulation, according to Bryman (2006), refers to “the use of more than one approach to the investigation of the research question in order to enhance the confidence in the ensuing findings”.

This is further explained by Branigan (2002) who states that some of the wide range of information gathering strategies used in action research are: discussions, notes, reflections, oral histories, case studies, questionnaires, surveys, focus groups, audits, statistics, checklists, journals, photographs, videotapes and logs of meetings, events and strategies. The rigour comes in choosing and applying the method that is most appropriate to the situation, then using another method and another one until a rich body of information is gathered that puts together a comprehensive picture (Dick 1999).

As there were three groups participating in the project, a triangulation of the process was already set in motion. The three groups went through the action research process separately but simultaneously. A presentation format was prepared before each meeting with the groups. There was a common presentation format to ensure the validity of the information from the different groups. The presentations were prepared according to the plan for each action research cycle. After the meetings were over, the researcher went through a regular and constant process of reflection about the research. Based on these reflections, a review of information obtained from the participants and the research map, the next presentation was prepared for the next cycle and meetings with the teachers.

Information about the participants was collected during the project implementation using various techniques to ensure triangulation of information. The techniques used have been entailed below.

**1. Group discussions:** The researcher prepared a presentation to guide the group discussions so as to match the project objectives. Each group met separately but had the same topic for discussion. Each participant was encouraged to participate and share ideas.

**2. Feedback questionnaires:** To ensure that every participant teacher gets a chance to express his/her feelings about the project and also to elicit the relevant information, questionnaires were developed and used. For instance, the Teachers’ Feedback Form (TF1, attached in appendix) was used during the first meeting with the teachers to get their demographic information.

**3. Individual reflection journals:** After each group discussion/ meeting, a “reflection journal’ form was handed over to each participant, which they were asked to review and fill. Some of them filled the journal regularly but some preferred to discuss than fill journals.

**4. Personal Interviews:** As the researcher was the link between the project objectives and the actual happenings, so she tried to meet the participants to encourage them to review what all we were doing, as well as remind them about the next meetings. The last personal interview format (appendix) was planned to elicit feedback and observations from the participants at the end of the action research process. The personal interviews were not limited to the project but the researcher also experienced a change in my relationships with the participants. To emphasize this change, I would like to quote from my reflections:

*“Sometimes I realized that I was not just a facilitator but becoming a confidant for some of the participants. They had started to seek opportunity to come and meet me to discuss not only their feelings about the project but also personal matters.”*

**5. Voice recordings:** I have also kept voice recordings of some of the meetings and the personal interviews. I wrote the transcripts for these. Some of the transcripts were used in the next chapter to share the findings.

**6. Researcher’s reflections:** An important aspect of the action research is that the researcher records his/her own reflections and experiences about the processes. The researcher made it a point to record her reflections after each group and individual meetings. The researcher also maintained a journal during the course of this research. Some entries were just chronological records of the happenings and the others included her feelings and observations during the action research implementation.

#### **4. RIGOR IN RESEARCH**

As this was a project based on the action research technique, another important aspect that requires attention is about the rigor and quality of this research.

In searching for the meaning of rigor in research Davies and Dodd (2002) state that this term rigor appears in reference to the discussion about reliability and validity. Rigor in research in the more familiar quantitative style is often defined as being able to measure or quantify results. This may include methods such as pre and post testing, statistical analysis, or questionnaires. However, according to Branigan, (2002), rigor is evident in any kind of research

when the methods used are those that can represent the fullest, most detailed, rich and expressive picture of a particular situation.

Further explanation of what is implied by a rigorous research is given by Swepson (2000) who says: *“A more appropriate criterion of rigor is the degree of the relevance of the methodology to the problem; the one which best allows the researcher to conduct systematic inquiry in order to present a warranted assertion - that is, the methodology is fit for a given function.”*

Discussing rigour in qualitative research, Davies and Dodd (2002) argue that the application of the notion rigor should differ from those in quantitative research by “accepting that there is a quantitative bias in the concept of rigor”. So we must review what happens during an action research, which is a qualitative methodology. It is of course important to have a research which is rigorous, and the findings are trustworthy.

Action research was chosen as the methodology appropriate for the given study. This method in itself has some in built characteristics which help the researcher ensure “rigor”. The spirals of action research deserve special attention. According to Dick (2000), their main function is to provide flexibility and responsiveness for effective change. Furthermore the author states that they also confer two advantages that are less evident in theory-driven research:

- *“Each turn of the spiral provides you with yet another chance to test the interpretations you have so far developed against the data you are collecting.*
- *Within each turn you develop plans to test in action. Each turn of the spiral is a miniature test of the assumptions that guided your plans.”*

According to Branigan (2002), rigor in action research is achieved when the most appropriate methodologies are applied to data collection and analysis. Use of multiple methods or **triangulation** ensures rigour in action research findings.

As quoted in the chapter 2, Dick (1999) highlights that action research is made up of 'a family of research methodologies with the dual aims of action (that is, change) and research (that is, understanding). To reiterate this point in this current study, various methods to acquire the relevant information from the participants.

To clarify the theoretical underpinnings of the above stand one can refer to an explanation by Branigan (2002): *“The methods used in action research are required to be responsive and flexible if they are to achieve both change and understanding. This is made easy by the fact that action research is based on the idea of multiple methods, sometimes also referred to as triangulation, which means a number of different methods are used to generate the fullest possible understanding of an issue”*.

The rigor comes in choosing and applying the method that is most appropriate to the situation, then using another method and another one until a rich body of information is gathered that puts together a comprehensive picture (Dick, 1999). Thus, multiple methods or triangulation was used to collect the information, from more than one source, at more than one point in time, in a number of different ways (as highlighted in the previous section) during the research implementation.

Along with this the participants formed three groups and this grouping in it self contributed to the triangulation of process and information as each group went through the similar process, with information generated during one group discussion, used by the next group also in the same process.

For the current research, the action research technique offered the most appropriate method to comprehend and answer the research problem. The careful selection and use of multiple methods, the cyclical nature of the research process, and the focus on participation, provides the rigor in this approach (Branigan, 2002).

Action research progresses through cycles of planning-acting-observing-reflecting. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, each cycle gave information for the next stage of the research. The cyclical and action orientation nature of action research is, in and of itself, conducive to rigour. As data collection and interpretation tend to occur at the same time, later cycles can be used to test both data and interpretations from earlier cycles (Dick, 1999).

Furthermore, the participatory nature of this action research project meant that many people were involved in the research process – with the information coming in from various sources such as the researcher, the three groups, the individual teachers, the school head and the school management. This form of triangulation generates multiple data sources and wide and diverse samples (Dick, 1999).

### Criteria of Rigor in Research

In an interesting discussion on the same topic of upholding “rigor” in research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that sustaining the trustworthiness of a research report depends on the issues, quantitatively, discussed as validity and reliability. They went on to propose four criteria for judging the soundness of qualitative research and explicitly offered these as an alternative to more traditional quantitatively-oriented criteria. They felt that their four criteria, as shown in table 4, better reflected the underlying assumptions involved in much of qualitative research.

**Table 4** Criteria for Judging Rigor in Research

<b>Traditional Criteria for Judging Quantitative Research</b>	<b>Alternative Criteria for Judging Qualitative Research</b>
Internal Validity	Credibility
External validity	Transferability
Reliability	Dependability
Objectivity	Confirmability

The following section refers to the above criteria and discusses how the current research upheld the criteria for maintaining rigor.

#### 4.1 Credibility

Internal validity of the research findings refers to that the information obtained is credible or believable. As the purpose of the research was to depict the participants’ perspective, steps were taken to represent that carefully. The research area under investigation was of practical relevance to the school management and the teachers. The researcher’s experience of working in the same work environment as the participants provided an understanding of the research context.

The data that was obtained was triangulated through multi method approaches and hence the data obtained from the group discussions was referred to in the individual interviews and also through reflection journals. Another important measure was triangulation of data sources, such that the information gathered from the participants was shared with the school head and the management. An important support for credibility of information the generated was the implementation of some of the feedbacks by the school management during the

working school term itself. This in itself assured the researcher and the participants that the action research process was giving credible and valuable information for the whole process of school improvement and teacher well-being.

#### **4.2 Transferability**

The external validity refers to the transferability of the research findings. It implies that the research findings could be a source of information to similar contexts. This was upheld by giving a detailed description about the context of the present research. Information about the international school, its culture, environment and the participants has all been provided in this chapter.

#### **4.3 Dependability**

Another important facet of any research Endeavour is the reliability of the findings. To be more specific with the term of reliability in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) use “dependability”, in qualitative research which closely corresponds to the notion of “reliability” in quantitative research. This research upheld this criterion by making the data collection process and documents all available for cross referencing. The details of the documents have been enlisted and also attached in the appendix.

#### **4.4 Confirmability**

Maintaining confirmability of data and interpretations is another important aspect of the research. The findings of this research were cross checked with the participants during the implementation of the cycles itself. Raw data was cross checked at various levels- group discussions, individual interviews and reflection journals. The feedbacks generated were shared with the school’s head and management. Furthermore it was observed that some of the suggestions were implemented by them during that very school term.

Thus, as this action research was conducted caution was taken to ensure that the methods should generate information which upholds the trustworthiness, rigor and quality in the findings of this study.

### **5. RESEARCH ETHICS**

An important issue in conducting action research is that of maintaining the research ethics. According to Mertler (2006) research ethics deals with the moral aspect of conducting



research, especially research involving human beings. Consideration should be given to how the participants involved are treated, the level of honesty and openness with them, and the manner in which the results are reported.

To uphold the research ethics in this research, the following measures were done:

1. Written consent from management: Informed the management and the principal of the school about the research scope, objectives and requirements. Written consent was obtained from them for carrying out the research based project at school.

2. Informing all school teachers with honesty: All the school teachers were informed about this research project by the school's principal during a staff meeting. Participation was invited from the teachers during this meeting. They were honestly informed that this school based project would be conducted for human resource development but it would also be a part of the researcher's Ph.D. dissertation. Written consent for participation was acquired from the participants and this was verbally verified during the course of the project.

3. Openness in dealing with participants: The participants were told through presentation mode about the objectives of this research and their role and benefits from engaging in the research project. They were informed again clearly that their participation is voluntary.

4. Maintain honest and close relationship with participants: A relationship of honesty and friendship with all the participants. During the course of this project, some of them even approached the researcher to share their personal problems. The researcher took care about their availability and adjusted the meetings schedules to suit their convenience.

5. Confidentiality of information: At the beginning of the project the participants were assured of the confidentiality of the information they shared. At no times were their names quoted or reported in reports and feedbacks given to the school's management.

6. Reporting honestly: The researcher has taken care to report honestly all the research findings obtained during the implementation of the project.

As stated by Mills (2003) research ethics deal with "basically doing the right thing" from the research perspective. Thus, the researcher felt confident that she has upheld the research ethics in this current study to the best of her understanding and ability.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The data obtained from the action research was analyzed utilizing interpretative inductive approaches of qualitative data analyses. Data was examined in order to find the answers to the research questions. According to Stringer (1999) the information obtained from action research has to be analyzed for “key elements, features, structures and themes”. Analyzing information was time consuming as categories, themes and patterns emerge from the data, and then these have to be sorted out according to the objectives of the research.

The relevant literature was reviewed to understand the action research data analyses procedure. A step wise guide to data analyses given by Stringer (2004) was followed that included:

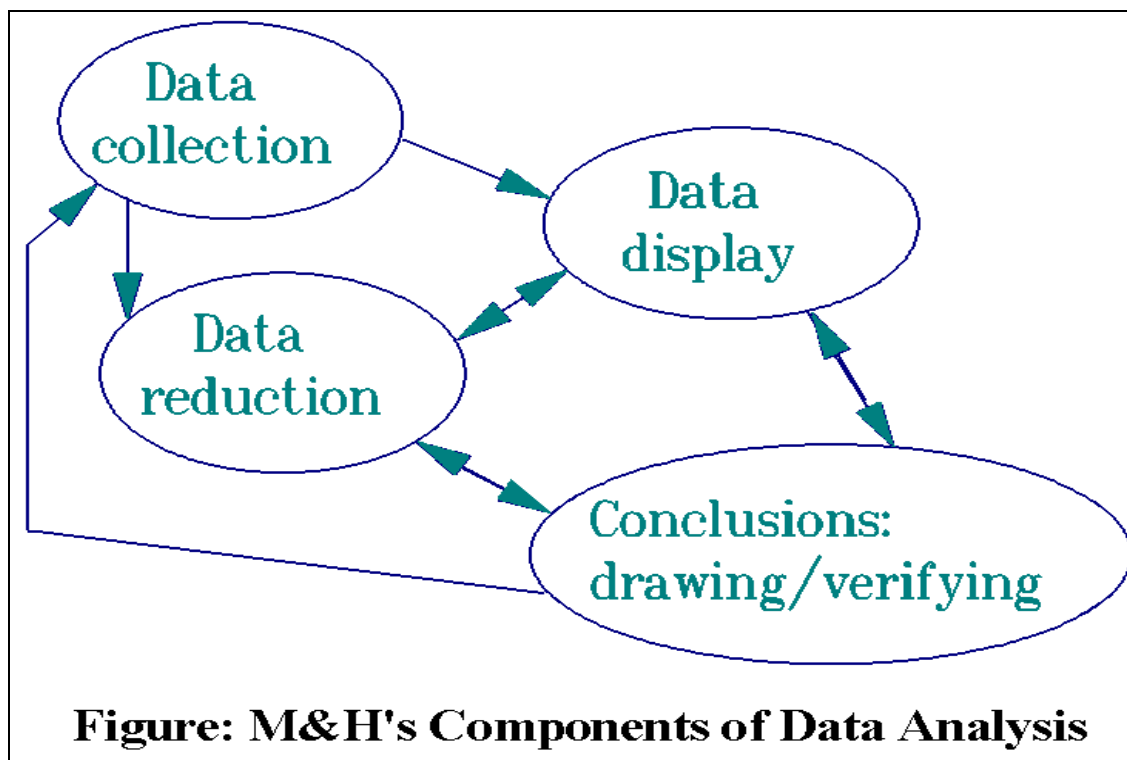
1. Identifying key features of experience
2. Analyzing epiphanies and illuminative experiences
3. Categorizing and coding
4. Enhancing analysis
5. Constructing category systems

As shared in the previous section, a good amount of information was generated using the various techniques of interviews, group discussions and reflective journals. From the researcher’s personal experience it was learnt that one could not ignore this data being collected till the end for analyses. In fact one had to reflect and review the information to be able to proceed further to the next cycle. This process helped in two ways- first to provide the relevant information for the review of current cycle and secondly it helped in sorting out the data as we collected it.

This view is supported by Pope, Ziebland, and Mays, (2000) who write that “in much of qualitative research the analytical process begins during data collection as the data are analyzed and shape the ongoing data collection”. Hence the data analyses process was in motion even as the information was being generated. This continuous reflective process was critical as it helped to understand if we are reaching towards a “saturation point” of the data and can no longer obtain more information about the topic under investigation.

Many researchers have presented various models to guide the qualitative analyses of information. Miles and Huberman (1994) propose a methodology for productive qualitative research that also provides a model for quantitative research. Their proposal is a useful guide

to researchers who care about their research, whether labeled qualitative or quantitative. The Figure 4 summarizes their approach. This iterative process of analysis does require more thought, and take more time, than off-the-shelf quantitative analysis, but is more likely to lead to useful and defensible findings.



**Figure 4** Miles & Huberman's Guide to Components of Data Analysis

This is the frame of reference that helped the researcher to make sense out of the information that was collected through this project. As evident this process helps in a spiral reflection of the data collected. As the project progressed and went through each cycle and relevant information was obtained, displayed, reduced it to meaningful terms and then conclusions were drawn. Meaning was given to the information drawing from literature review and the previous researches in the relevant field, for instance the field of teachers stress. These conclusions helped in understanding where the research was progressing in terms of the basic objectives. These also helped in proceeding further or planning the next step in the cyclical research.

Although many qualitative studies are using computer software to analyse the information, no software has been used for this purpose. To support this stand one can perhaps refer to Pope, Ziebland, and Mays (2000), who highlight that software, should be used with caution. The main consideration in using the software is the size of the sample and the amount of information collected. According to the authors, unlike the quantitative analyses, sample size doesn't increase the "power" of the study. The sample size should be directed by the research question and the analytical requirements.

The information collected in the research was coded, classified and terms were deciphered in a systematic process of regular review. According to Silverman, (2004), content analysis is a procedure for the categorization of verbal or behavioural data for the purposes of classification, summarisation and tabulation. The author has given a lucid presentation of the step wise procedure for content analysis and his book was an important source of understanding for me. For instance in the first cycle the participants identified the sources of work stress. The data was compiled and sorted out in to similar categories of responses. These were later classified in to six areas of stress related to "work, students, resources limitation, management support, school policy and interpersonal relationships".

Another important facet to the data analysis was that the sharing of the consolidated information with the group of participants who generated it, with the other groups in the project, with the school head, and also the management representative. At the same time this information was also shared with the research advisors for their critical inputs. Any modifications suggested were incorporated and the process went on.

Thus we come to the end of this chapter in which we reviewed the action research plan, the procedure, the process of data collection, and finally the data analysis. The next chapter describes the actual process to implement the action research based project.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **IMPLEMENTING THE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT**

This chapter describes in detail the action research based methodology for implementing the study process. It illustrates how each action based cycle of the project was implemented along with the collaboration of the teachers working at the international school.

#### **AN OVERVIEW**

This research was launched as a “human resource development project” for the teachers working at an international school. The project was first introduced to the school’s principal and the management by the researcher. The project objectives and desired results were shared with them. The researcher explained that academically she had the choice to do this kind of a project or continue to do some quantitative study/ survey with teachers. The researcher shared that the purpose of this research project was not only to gain knowledge personally but to contribute to improving the work place with the larger perspective of an applied behavioural scientist. Personally the researcher went through a challenging time during this at the school as the school management changed. The researcher had to go through the task of “proving” her self and the research purpose again and again. Though not easy and time consuming, approval was finally secured to launch the project with the support of the management.

On reflection one can claim that the challenge of launching the project at school helped the researcher to clarify her own thought process and goals as well as strengthened my determination to carry out the project. Personally she had to continuously go through the action research cycles of “plan-act-observe-reflect”. At the end of each cycle some thing new had been learned and thought process became more lucid. Along with this it also strengthened the conviction that as a researcher something needs to be done for the teachers working at this school who were indeed under a lot of stress to due to so much instability in the working environment.

The following sections provide the details of the project implementation.

## **PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION**

After planning for years and finally securing approval the project was implemented at the international school as a “human resource development project for the teachers working in the school” from February 2008 onwards.

The planning for this research based project had been going on for some time. This involved the preparation for the implementation of this project, preparation of a formal research proposal, and securing approval from school management to implement the project.

This was followed by the implementation of the action research based cyclical investigations. The actual implementation of the action research cycles of the project took about three months. The basic objective of the action research phase is to provide inputs to the international school teachers so that they may gear up to strengthen their coping skills to deal with the demands of the school environment.

The project was introduced to all the school teachers by the school’s principal in a staff meeting. The researcher was then asked to share a brief overview of the project with the teachers. Teachers were invited to participate in the project on a voluntary basis. At the staff meeting, 16 teachers volunteered to join the project. These teachers belonged to the three sections of the school- the kindergarten, the elementary and the secondary. When the meetings for the project began, only twelve teachers participated actively. Others had dropped out due to their own personal reasons that have been elaborated in the previous chapter, and though they were invited again to come for the meetings, they did not join. However the project continued with the twelve participants.

### **THE PARTICIPANTS**

Twelve teachers working in an international school in Bangkok, Thailand participated in this research project on a voluntary basis. These teachers worked in three different school sections and represented the issues pertaining to each of the section. In the initial stages of the project the teachers divided themselves in to three groups based on different sections- three teachers were from the kindergarten, five from the elementary section and four from the secondary section.

Demographic information was taken from the participants during the initial phase of the project before the action research cycles were put in to action. The demographic data of

the participants is shared here to show that the participants represented a mix of gender, nationality and marital status. Out of the twelve teacher participants, ten were females. They represented different nationalities: eight from India, two from Thailand and two from Philippines. Out of these participants, eleven teachers were married and one was single.

The average age of the participants was 40.3 years. They had worked in the current school for an average of 6.6 years, ranging from 6 months to over 11 years.

In the initial stages of the project the teachers divided them selves in to three groups from the three sections of the school - 3 teachers were from the kindergarten (KGS), 5 from the elementary section (ELS) and 4 from the secondary section (SRS). This was basically done by them so that they could come for the project meetings at convenient times as all the three school sections have different time tables during the day. Each group decided to meet during their lunch breaks as there was no time after school.

The three groups separately underwent the action research process to evolve coping plans to deal effectively with work stress. The groups were brought together as a combined group to initiate the action research cycles and finally to reflect together as a group to share and review their findings. In conclusion, they devised strategic coping plans for individuals and evolved suggestions for effective coping support practices that may be used by the management of international school.

### **LAUNCHING THE PROJECT- IDENTIFYING NAME AND OBJECTIVES**

The project was launched with the participant teachers as a human resource development project. As I mentioned before, the participants met in three groups – the kindergarten, the elementary and the secondary school teachers. At the initial stage of the project launch some activities were carried out to break ice with the participants and to get the teachers acquainted with the project. As the project facilitator I initiated the process by asking each group of teachers to suggest a name for the project as well review the project objectives that I had presented.

Group discussion formats were provided for each of the groups to share their views. Each of the three groups discussed and suggested the project name and modified some of the objectives. The information that emerged from all the three groups has been consolidated and presented in the subsequent segments.

## 1. The Project Name

The project was initially introduced to the school management and the principal by the researcher in its academic form which was *“To Enhance the Job well-being of Teachers working at the international school: An Action Research Approach”*.

The project was launched for the teachers at the school as “Celebrating your-self at work”. During the initial group discussions with the participants, each group was asked to identify with the project by suggesting a name of the project. All three groups gave various suggestions and decided that the management should choose the final name from all the given choices. The management representative was shown all the choices but he decided to name the project as- “Project HIE” (H=Happiness, I= Improves, E= efficiency). In his opinion he shared that happiness in teachers would lead to improvement in their efficiency at work.

This exercise in choosing the name for the project was just to help the participants identify and get a sense of belonging with the project. The chosen name had no further implications in the project.

## 2. Project Objectives

The objectives proposed initially for the project were modified after discussions with the school management and later on the teachers added some objectives to the project implementation. The final objectives for the action research project were then identified by the participants as:

2.1 To help teachers identify the major sources of work stress.

2.2 To bring an awareness among teachers that they can change their reactions to work stress by their own selves.

2.3 To improve the job well-being of teachers through strategic planning for effective coping behaviour.

2.4 To identify the areas of school improvement to support their job well-being.

2.5 To consolidate and share with school management, the feedback of from the teachers about the successful practices that may be adopted for the well-being of teachers working at the international school.



With the above objectives in perspective, the project was implemented at the international school. These objectives formed the guiding criteria for charting the course of the action research project. These were cross referred to during the implementation of the project.

## THE ACTION RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The guiding framework for this “Action Research” project was based on process cycles which were spiral or cyclical in nature. The action research specialists, such as Kemmis and McTaggart (1982) highlight the cyclical process for an action research approach. The grounded cyclical framework for the action research method includes four basic steps of “plan-act-observe-reflect” and is represented in figure 5. After the completion of each cycle, the plan is reviewed and revised and then the new cycle is implemented. The cycles continue till the objective of the research is achieved and saturated information is obtained.

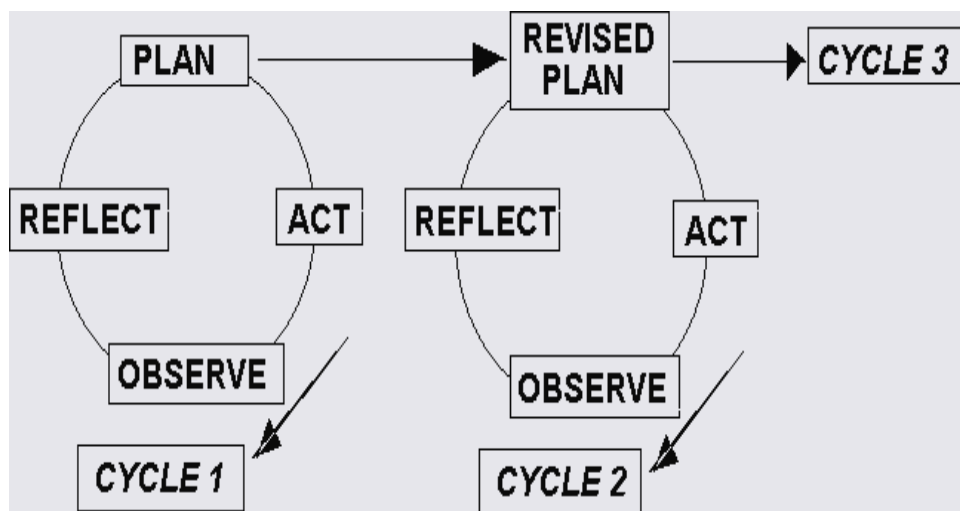
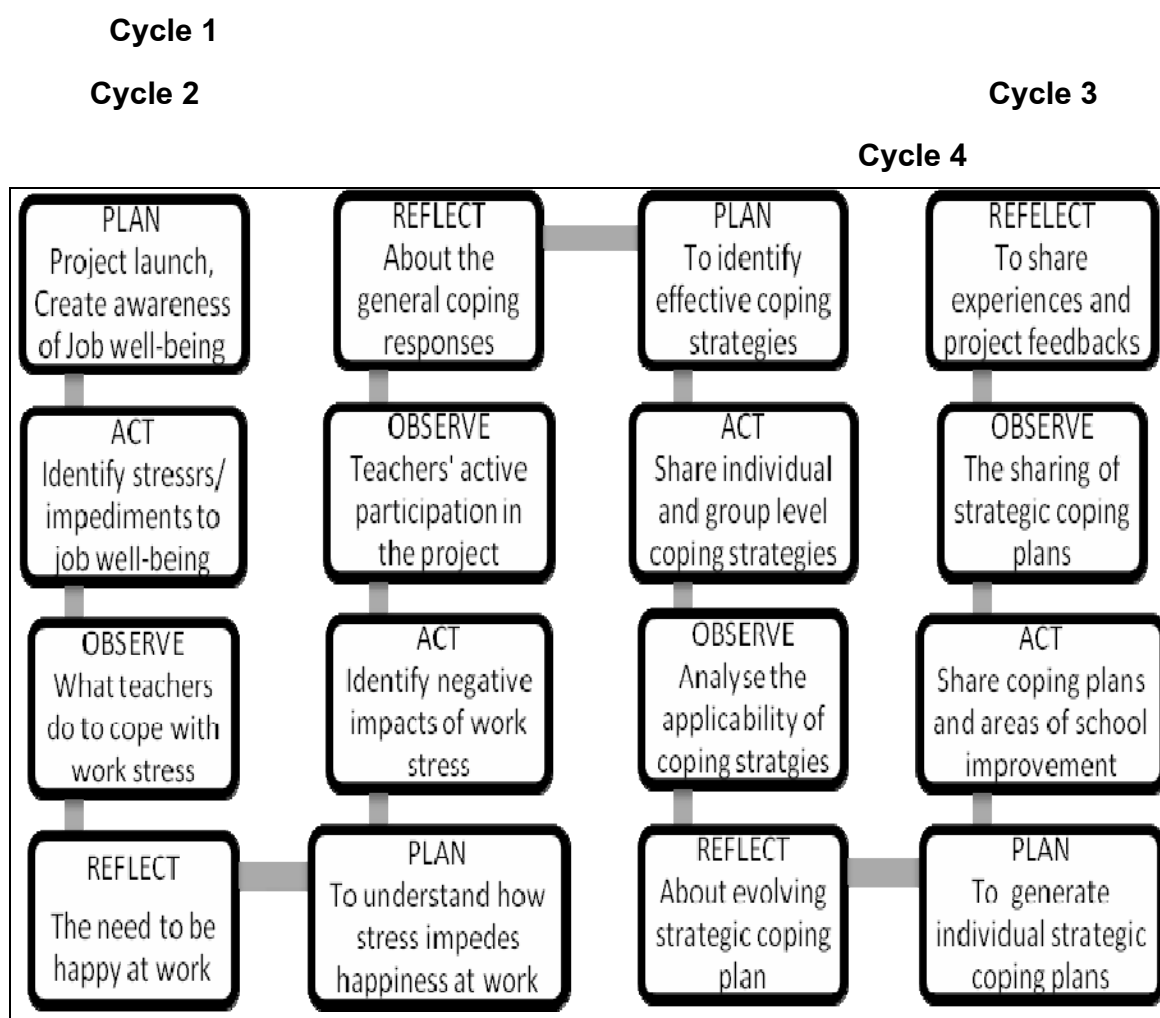


Figure 5 Guiding Framework for Action Research

## THE ACTION RESEARCH CYCLES

The current study was based on the essence of action research, and a cyclical pattern of plan-act-observe-reflect was followed during the implementation of the research project. The process was guided by the objectives of the research. The overview of the cyclical flow of the project is shown in figure 6. Four cycles were completed in the action research process.

The figure 6 represents an overview of the four action research cycles or the spirals in investigation of the information sought from the participants. Each cycle had the four steps of “plan-act-observe-reflect”. The first step meant “planning” for the action required in the cycle. This was followed by implementation of the plan through the necessary participation of the teachers in group meetings, personal interviews and individual feedback surveys. Observations from the participants and their reflections about the process were noted by the researcher. Along with this the feelings of the teachers were noted by themselves in reflection journals. There was a step wise flow of information in each cycle and the final reflection at the end of one cycle lead to the consequent cycle.



**Figure 6** The Action Research Project Cycles

This following section elaborates the flow of information in the action research cycles and the processes followed to collect information or data during the project. The preparation to launch the project began at least a few months before the implementation. As mentioned before, this involved obtaining the formal approval from the school management and principal for the implementation.

The whole action research flow was implemented during six group sessions and some personal interviews over a period of three months as shown in the tabular form in the appendix. The four cycles of the project were completed over these individual and group sessions. Each session format was guided by the project objective and the information flow lead to the consecutive session. Participants attended the project in three separate groups. The three groups are represented as teachers from the “KGS” or the kindergarten section, “ELS” or the elementary section and “SRS” or the secondary school.

According to an eminent specialist in the field of action research, Jean McNiff (1997) self reflection is a very important part of any action research project. She states:

*“The idea of self reflection is central. In traditional forms of research – empirical research – researchers do research on other people. In action research, researchers do research on themselves. Empirical researchers enquire into other people’s lives. Action researchers enquire into their own lives. Action research is an enquiry conducted by the self into the self.”*

The teacher participants were asked to note their feelings about issues related to the project in their reflection journal (forms were given for this purpose). The researcher also kept a reflection journal to note all the observations as the teachers went through the action research cycles. Reflections were noted after each meeting or session with the participants. This contributed to the planning of the next action cycle and often led to a change in my plan for the next session. A reflective process was followed after each action research cycle and thus the information flow was developed.

Thus the personal reflections of the participants and the researcher enhanced the information obtained from each cycle and the cycles were carried out till information obtained was saturated as per the needs of fulfilling the project objectives. When the teachers reached a level of saturation in sharing information about planning strategically to evolve coping, the

cycles came to an end. The cyclical flow of the project is represented in the subsequent segment.

### **CYCLE 1**

The cycle 1 lasted over two weeks with the formal introduction of the action research project to the teacher participants at the international school. The basic purpose of this cycle was to stimulate awareness about the importance of job well-being in teachers working in the international school.

#### **Plan**

The plan for the first cycle of the action research project was based on the purpose of introducing the project at school and stimulating the thinking of the participants. Hence, the planned objectives of cycle 1 were:

1. To introduce the project to all the international school's teachers.
2. To invite their voluntary participation for the project.
3. Launch the project by first trying to create awareness about the importance of happiness at work.
4. To "break ice" with the participants – by involving them in identifying a project name and objectives.

#### **Act**

The initial cycle of the project began with the formal introduction of the project to all the school teachers working at this particular international school. After clarifying my project purpose and format to both the school's board of management and the new principal, the researcher finally got the "green signal" to launch the project.

The school principal called for a staff meeting and introduced the project to all teachers. He said that since the researcher was the human resource manager at the school, this project was designed to enhance the human resource development. After his introductory speech, teachers were invited to join the project. It was clarified that we needed at least fifteen teachers to volunteer and there should be representation from all three academic sections of the school- kindergarten, elementary and secondary.

An introductory session was planned with all teachers invited to join in. Out of the first 16 volunteers, 13 teachers came for this session. This session began with “Breaking Ice” among the teachers who volunteered to join the project and they were asked to do a survey on Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). This SWLS scale (attached in the appendix) was developed by Diener et al., (1985) to evaluate a global measure of life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is one factor in the more general construct of subjective well being. Life satisfaction is distinguished from affective appraisal in that it is more cognitively than emotionally driven. Life satisfaction can be assessed specific to a particular domain of life (e.g., work, family) or globally. It was explained that the feelings about how satisfied one is with life also relates to the feelings about how satisfied one is with one’s work too as work forms a large part of our lives.

Then the session went on to introduce the concept of job well-being or feeling satisfied with one’s work in general. Through power point presentation, they were encouraged to think about “why is happiness at work” important and briefly about the nature of teacher’s work is often stressful. An over view was given about the project by sharing the objectives of the Project. Some of these benefits of this project that were highlighted were that it would help develop:

- A feeling of well-being related to work
- An ability to cope better with stress- both at work and in life
- A feeling that you have to be responsible for your own happiness
- A happier person, that’s “you” and only then can you make other’s “happy”.

An important event occurred at this stage. As the volunteers ended the first group meeting they decided to meet group wise for the subsequent meetings. They divided into three groups- kindergarten, elementary and secondary school sections. They expressed that it is more convenient to meet in their own groups due to the paucity of time and the school schedules, which were different for all the three groups.

After the first group meeting, each participant was given a feedback form (labeled TF1 and attached in the appendix) to give their demographic details.

The next round of the project meetings were held in the form of group discussions. Each of the three groups discussed the project names, and goals. Some groups suggested new objectives. The groups were eager to not only focus on their own “happiness” at work but also wanted to share feedbacks about school improvement. This was not initially a project objective but became an important part of this action research as the teachers explained that “this was important to their own happiness at work”. To facilitate a better focus on the project the teachers and the researcher divided the project activities in to 2 phases:

*Phase 1:* Develop strategies for self improvement and better coping (which were discussed in cycle two).

*Phase 2:* Identify strategic areas for school improvement (discussed in cycle four).

Group discussions were held to during the second session of the same cycle to:

1. Identify what are the work stressors at school
2. Identify their reactions to work stress
3. Enlist some things that they do to cope with work stress

Along with the group discussion each participant was asked to return the first feedback form given earlier (TF1) and then they were handed a form for individual reflection journal (RF1, attached in the appendix). The teachers were urged to fill up their reflections about the stress experienced at school and what they did to cope with it.

### **Observe**

During the first cycle the participants observed some specific information that is relevant to the course of the action research.

Out of the sixteen initial volunteers for the project, only twelve came for the group meetings. Teachers volunteered and divided into three groups- kindergarten, elementary and senior school sections. This allowed for information to be triangulated.

All the three groups preferred to meet during their lunch breaks.

Individual participants were given open ended survey questionnaires and reflection journals, which were not filled by all. All the teachers gave back their feedback forms though some did indicate a lack of time to sit and write. However they preferred to talk about their reflections on their coping behavior (in the form TF 2 given to them) and also “individual reflection journal” about the perceived stress at work (RF 1- to be filled for the week).

Interestingly the kindergarten teachers said during the group discussion that they have nothing to fill in the RF1 as they felt they do not have “stress” at work. But later on during the project they went on to identify the sources of work stress.

Each of the groups identified the various sources of stress which I later coded in to stress related to their workload, the students, the management support and the resources available. This discussion was very lively and participants discussed openly amongst themselves.

By the time each group met for their group discussions they were very participative. They gave important feedbacks and suggestions like the secondary section teachers mentioned that in the Reflection Journal they would like to modify “high levels” of stress to just “stress”.

### **Reflect**

A very significant happening occurred at the very beginning of the project. Though not planned initially, the participants decided to attend the project meetings in three different groups. These groups emerged facilitating the triangulation of data.

The first meeting started with some teachers not coming to join. For instance, in the secondary school section, out of initial 6, only 4 participants came and out of 7 elementary teachers 5 came. The researcher invited the missing participants again but later on decided to proceed with the active voluntary participation of 12 teachers.

By the second meeting, the teachers started showing an interest to stay and discuss. The kindergarten teachers wanted to stay longer but another group came for the project meeting and they had to leave. The elementary teachers were all present and participated well.

After interacting with the teachers during the group discussion the researcher decided to give them some reading materials to stimulate their thought process. She also consulted her research advisors about it and they encouraged her to go ahead with it. When the participants were asked if they would like to get some reading materials, most teachers wanted print-outs while two wanted them through email. So we decided to share print outs. Materials given for reading to stimulate awareness about the impact of stress and this print out (attached in appendix) was- “Beating Stress” by Johnson (2006), which was an online article focused on teacher stress.

Thus, at the end of the first cycle of this action research, serious participation was accepted by twelve out of initial sixteen volunteer teachers. The participants have been

stimulated to think about their own job well-being or “happiness at work”. They have been able to first identify what are the sources of their work related stress. They were now given the feedback form -TF 2 (attached in the appendix) to stimulate them to think about what they did to cope with their work stress.

Through the group discussions, reading material and the feedback forms given to them, we are on our path to understanding the importance of being happy at work. This was the beginning towards achieving the objective of creating awareness about the need for coping at work place.

## **CYCLE 2**

The second cycle was implemented over a period of three weeks. It involved two sessions of group discussions and some personal interview sessions. After the first cycle had stimulated the teacher participants to think about “being happy at work”, we were ready to progress to the next stage of the project, that is to understand how stress impedes their happiness at work. Hence, the basic purpose of this cycle for the participants was to clarify their understanding of work stress and the reactions to work stress.

### **Plan**

A plan was generated for the second cycle along with the participants. The objectives were meant to lead the participants to a better understanding of work related stress and its negative impacts on happiness of the worker. The objectives were:

1. To identify the negative impacts of work stress.
2. To identify the strategies used by the participants for coping with the stress at work.

With the plan to achieve the desired objectives, the participants were invited to come for group meetings.

### **Act**

The teacher participants continued to meet in the three different groups. A common presentation format was prepared for all the three group discussions. Modifications were made as required for instance sometimes we would deviate from the topic of discussion and then time would not be enough to cover the planned discussion. The remaining agenda was then carried forward to the next session with them.



The second cycle commenced with a brief review about what had happened before, the sources of stress that they had identified. They were informed that once we knew about the sources of stress we should try and understand that this stress leads to various strains and impacts. The groups participated actively to identify the negative impacts of work stress on various levels. The broad categories of stress impacts were on:

- Personal level (physical, emotional)
- With students
- With family and friends
- With others

The details of the feedbacks about work stress impacts are discussed in the following chapter. Then the next course of action during this cycle was to understand what the teachers do to cope with their work related stress. The teachers had been encouraged to “reflect” by keeping the Reflection Journals to note the daily perceived stress. They were then urged to share their feedbacks during group discussions about the coping strategies employed by them to cope with work stress.

The teachers shared that they experience stress and they also do something to cope with it. However they said that “if we didn’t learn to cope with work stress we wouldn’t be in this profession.”

They actively participated in sharing what they do to cope with work stress. They urged that at this stage we should also talk about “what can be done to improve coping at school”. This emerged as a strong area of participation for all three groups. They were eager to give suggestions as to what all activities can be done “together at school” to provide an outlet for “de-stressing” and learning to cope better. For instance they suggested “doing dances and singing together” or “doing meditation”. They suggested that the best time for these activities could be after school.

Thus this input from the participants was later consolidated and discussed in the next cycle as the strategic areas to improve coping at work through:

- Individual Level (strategies for each person)
- Group Level (strategies that can be implemented together at the school)

### **Observe**

By this stage in the cyclical research process the participants in groups showed active involvement in the discussions and sharing their experiences.

Along with the group meetings the researcher was encouraging them to fill the “individual reflection journal” (RF2), to reflect about their coping behaviour, for the coming week till we met again.

From the kindergarten meetings it was observed that they emphasized the importance of implementing some of the group level coping strategies “now or in this school term”.

An interesting observation that emerged from the elementary section and was later shared with others was that “since there are individual differences in the need for coping, so one cannot recommend one “coping plan” but develop it to suit each individual”. Teachers were able to share some personal recommendations. For instance a teacher shared that “I smile at myself each day when I wake up”.

It was a very interesting strategy and when it was shared with the other groups, some of the teachers decided to practice it too.

After the secondary teachers left from the Group discussion, it was followed by an in-depth interview with one of the teachers to share his personal reflections on what he did to cope with work stress. He mentioned that he “made time for me” each day. He took time to reflect on his actions. He also shared that he has developed “interests away from school” to continue his personal growth. He had developed interest in dancing as a hobby.

It was noted that there are some unscheduled activities due to which the scheduled meetings with teachers got delayed. So the planned meetings had to be rescheduled time and again.

### **Reflect**

During this cycle reflections revealed that the teacher participants were actually “happy” when they came for the meeting. In fact the elementary teachers called this the ‘Happy Meeting’ and expressed during the group discussion that they were happy to come for it.

As we went through the cycle of identifying work stressors and discussing coping activities, it was noted that the teachers preferred to focus on “group” coping activities. All the three groups shared that they would like to have an annual plan in the school calendar for management support to implement their activities.

One of the teachers in the elementary school asked during the group meetings “when would we see changes in the school management?” Once again it was emphasized that the responsibility of being “happy” is in each individual’s control and one must find time for self to reflect, refresh and renew oneself.

The researcher continued to provide them with the “reflection journals” and some reading materials to support the action research project. An article by Stacy Weiner (2008), “The How of Happiness”, was given for reading to emphasize awareness about individuals being responsible for their own happiness. It was noted that the participants are more involved now and are reflecting on the materials given to them.

As this cycle came to an end, it was recommended that if the teachers would like to try they may do “An exercise in gratitude”. The researcher told them both during the group meeting as well as on the “reflection journal” form that “it is to be implemented by you – for yourself at home. At the end of each day, can you mentally recall 5 things that you are grateful for that happened during the day”? They were also urged to recollect their group discussions and sharing of information, and then think of developing a strategic “coping plan” to deal effectively with work stress. Hence, we had gone through this cycle to achieve the project objective of identifying the sources of stress at work. We had also started the journey towards the objective of creating awareness about changing the reactions to stress.

### **CYCLE 3**

The third cycle of this project needed three weeks for implementation, and entailed the participants meeting in groups for two group sessions. The participant teachers had now been involved in the two cycles to become aware about the importance of feeling “happy at work” and had gone on to investigate what impedes their happiness at work as well as what they do to cope with this stress. The basic purpose of this cycle was to promote awareness in teachers to develop personal coping plans as the means of achieving “happiness” at work place.

### **Plan**

The plan for this cycle was evolved through a review of the project objectives and the feedbacks of the participants. The planned course of action in this cycle of the project was developed to achieve the following goals:

1. Participants to “reflect” about the best coping strategies that may help them cope better with work stress.
2. Identify the resources required for implementing the coping practices
3. Encourage the participants to develop their strategic coping plans.

### **Act**

To stimulate and prepare the teachers for the group discussion on the desired topics, they were asked to think about coping strategies in the reading materials that were given to each participant at the end of the cycle.

During the group discussion that followed the teachers went on to identify the strategic areas to improve coping at work. They shared and discussed their own experiences and the coping strategies used by them. The feedbacks that emerged can be categorized into two areas as:

- Individual Level coping strategies (to be developed for each person)
- Group Level coping strategies (strategies that can be implemented together by all the teachers at the school)

The teachers also discussed and identified the resources needed for implementing their coping strategies. An interesting feedback emerged during this discussion. They understood that the school may not have many resources or finances available. So they suggested that the teachers themselves become the “resource person” for implementing the strategic plan of improving coping at school. For instance one of the kindergarten teachers was already practicing meditation and she offered to help teach it all the other teachers.

After this discussion, the participants were encouraged again to think of developing their individual “coping plan” for dealing with work stress effectively. By this time some of them had shared that they were using some strategies. Information consolidated from their discussions was shared that effective coping results from a “mind-body balance” which involves a balanced diet, physical exercise, cognitive changes and developing an area of interest.

### **Observe**

By this stage in the project the teachers' reactions about participating in the project indicated their growing interest to change and learn through this process. When the elementary teachers came for the meeting all were in a jovial mood and laughed a lot, though the discussion got diverted by this! They went on to say that they were here for the "happy meeting" and as one of the teachers expressed, "they feel happy that they have got this opportunity to come together and discuss issues very important to them".

As the participants went ahead to think and develop their "coping plans", it was noted from the responses in the reflection journals that some teachers had already developed successful strategies. However this project formed a platform for them to understand its importance as well become aware of other actions needed to cope with work stress.

The elementary teachers highlighted that management must be 'fair' in their work allocation and practices for all teachers to be really 'happy' at work. The kindergarten teachers hoped that with their feedbacks to the management, some teacher get-together or an outing would be organized this term. For the secondary teachers they came late for the meeting and as the time was limited we took a quick review. They gave suggestions for cross-cultural exchange of ideas among teachers.

### **Reflect**

As the feedbacks were shared and discussed actively, a new bonding emerged amongst the participants.

The teachers continued their reflections. The project meeting was termed as the "happy meeting" by the elementary teachers and the secondary teachers called it the 'Happy committee meeting'. A special feedback that the kindergarten teachers shared during the meeting was that they love working in the KGS and enjoy the love and support of their colleagues.

A significant aspect of this research project was that as the feedbacks emerged, the school's management and the principal asked me to share the findings. The researcher prepared a report of the findings assuring confidentiality so that it did not reveal the individual feedback but rather a consolidated report. The sharing of these regular feedbacks formed an important aspect for ensuring the meaningfulness and the rigour of this research.

The researcher continued to support the action research cycles by recommending them to practice the “exercise in gratitude”, and thinking about strategic planning for enhancing coping. To support their positive thinking, reading material downloaded from the net was shared with them - “A psychology of satisfaction”. The teachers were asked to fill in the Reflection Journal (RF-3) and think about their strategic coping plan.

As we ended this cycle we were on our way to attain the research objective of creating awareness to enhance job well-being through identification of effective coping strategies.

#### **CYCLE 4**

The last cycle was carried out over a period of four weeks. This cycle of investigation involved group meetings, combined meeting of the teachers, personal interviews and sharing of feedbacks with the school management. The basic purpose of this cycle was to promote review and study of strategic coping plans of the participant teachers.

##### **Plan**

The plan for the last phase of the study was to fulfil the following objectives:

1. Recommend the teachers to develop their strategic coping plans
2. To share their ideas about the areas of school improvement- which they had identified as important to their job well-being.
3. To have a combined Group Discussion to review all the processes that we have followed and to share the recommendations of each group for the coping strategies needed at work place
4. Finally to reflect about their feelings of participation in this project.

##### **Act**

At the end of our separate group meetings, all three groups reviewed the discussions we had done. A presentation was made to share the feedbacks and suggestions that had been consolidated by the researcher.

Some teachers had developed personal coping plans, and so they were asked to share them. Another handout was given at the end of the group meeting to remind them to

reflect and find time for them to be aware of their own happiness, and review their “Strategic Coping Plan”.

The researcher urged the teachers who had not developed any specific plans to think about the shared information in the project and be aware that their happiness was in their own hands.

The final group meetings ended with the teachers engaging in a discussion to identify the area of school improvement. The focus area of this discussion had emerged during the first cycle wherein all three groups showed an eagerness to give their feedbacks about improvement in the school. They had highlighted this as being very important to their being happy at the school. They felt that this information should be shared with the school principal and management as it would lead to improvement in school’s environment.

After the separate group meetings we decided to meet together and share the project findings. A combined meeting was scheduled and all the teachers were present there. They were shown a presentation of their discussions and findings. We discussed the school improvement areas identified by the groups. A very active discussion pursued to decide on the recommending the best practices for strategic coping and areas for the school’s improvement.

Again the combined groups’ feedbacks were consolidated and shared with the participants during the personal interview sessions that followed.

Interviews with individual teachers were carried out after the combined session to:

1. To reflect about the teachers’ feelings about strategically developing their coping plans
2. To urge them to continue to be aware that their happiness at work is in their own hands.
3. Reflect and share their feelings about the project

These personal interviews were carried out with the basic objective to encourage the teacher-participants to continue to be aware that the key to happiness is through self-awareness. The researcher asked them some questions on a pre-decided format, and this has been attached in the appendix. Some of the questions that were asked were: “What are your feelings about joining this project at school?”

The feedbacks from the participants were consolidated and shared with the school's head and management representative. The report maintained confidentiality and also highlighted the areas of school improvement suggested by the participants.

### **Observe**

By this last cycle in the project the teachers had been enthused to think about taking action for the sake of enhancing their happiness at work and developing strategic coping plans.

The kindergarten teachers observed and shared that they were thinking about themselves and their own happiness. They are all doing some activity to cope better with stress at work and putting in to practice some of the suggestions that had emerged during the group discussions. They openly shared their feelings about school improvement areas.

The elementary teachers had also shared their personal experiences and were participating actively in the project. However, one of the teachers observed that they "do not see any changes in the management as yet about their feedbacks". Hence once again they were urged to focus on "self" as the source of happiness...look into self before focusing on outside!

The secondary teachers did not have enough time for a group meeting. Instead of the group meeting, the researcher had individual meetings with the participants. Individually teachers were quite forth coming in their feedbacks. Two out of four teachers have their own Personal Coping plans in practice. It was observed that one teacher is happy to continue with her regular way of life. One teacher could not attend the last few meetings due to death in her family.

The combined group meeting was looked forward to and the teachers often enquired about it from me before we could schedule a time and date for it. The teachers participated actively. They slightly modified but accepted the name of the project suggested by the management. They noticed that they had common stressors and coping strategies recommended by different groups. They also discussed the importance of more areas to strengthen their well-being through improvement at school. They stressed on importance of developing good relationships among the teachers. This is the most important improvement at school according to them as it would lead to improvement through sharing of ideas and knowledge.



The management also took keen interest in the report feedbacks from the project. Again the researcher prepared and presented them with reports which entailed the feedback about school's improvement. The school's principal also started implementing some of the suggestions put across by the teacher participants.

### **Reflect**

We continued the discussions with the teachers about their strategic coping plans, which included strategies which are successful in helping to cope with work stress on an individual and group level. The researcher also encouraged them to actively think about themselves and their happiness. They were invited to share feelings and feedbacks about participating in the project. By the last stage in this cycle the teachers were ready to share their experience and feedbacks with the school management and other teachers.

The teachers reflected and shared that they enjoyed this project and the opportunity it had given to them to share and learn. Even after the project ended some of the teachers kept asking about "when would we meet again and what would we do next?"

The last cycle in the action research ended by the last objective of research being obtained, sharing the valuable feedbacks and suggestions with the school head and management representative.

A significant contribution of this research that was intended but not implied was that the management would take a serious view of the feedbacks that evolved and implement them for the improvement of the school. It was noted that some of the feedbacks were put in to practice the very same term of the school's functioning. Significant among the feedbacks that were implemented were taking the teachers out for a relaxing trip, allowing teacher involvement for curriculum changes and planning, making a school calendar with participation of teachers.

## **CONCLUSION OF ACTION RESEARCH CYCLES**

The implementation of action cycles was brought to a completion with the teacher participants reaching saturation in the information shared by them about strategically developing their plans for enhancing coping at work. Other information relevant to their job well-being was also generated through the project. This included identifying areas of school improvement and suggestions for school based support for group level coping activities.

As the action research cycles came to an end, some of the teachers had evolved awareness to deal with the work stress and are practicing their personal coping plans. Some have initiated and put in to practice the new learning's from the project. However, two of teachers registered and awareness to change but did not develop and personal coping plans. They shared that the project's participation had increased their awareness about thinking for themselves and their happiness.

A change in the attitude towards project participation was quite evident. Almost all teachers felt happy for a chance to share their feelings and exchange with other teachers.

One strong expectation that had emerged from the participants was that the school management "would do something from their feedbacks". This expectation was partly supported as some of their feedbacks were implemented in the short time frame of working.

Thus we ended the action research cycles which involved the active participation of the teachers in the process. The major purpose of this research was to ignite awareness in the teacher participants that the key of happiness at work was in their hands. As we reviewed, shared and discussed with each other, this project had been successful in part to stimulate this awareness.

With this last session ended the action research project implementation. The project ended in terms of group meetings however the researcher continued to interact and meet with the participants later on. They were eager to continue the project and also wanted to know of any results that would follow.

The next chapter represents the consolidated research findings and their interpretation.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

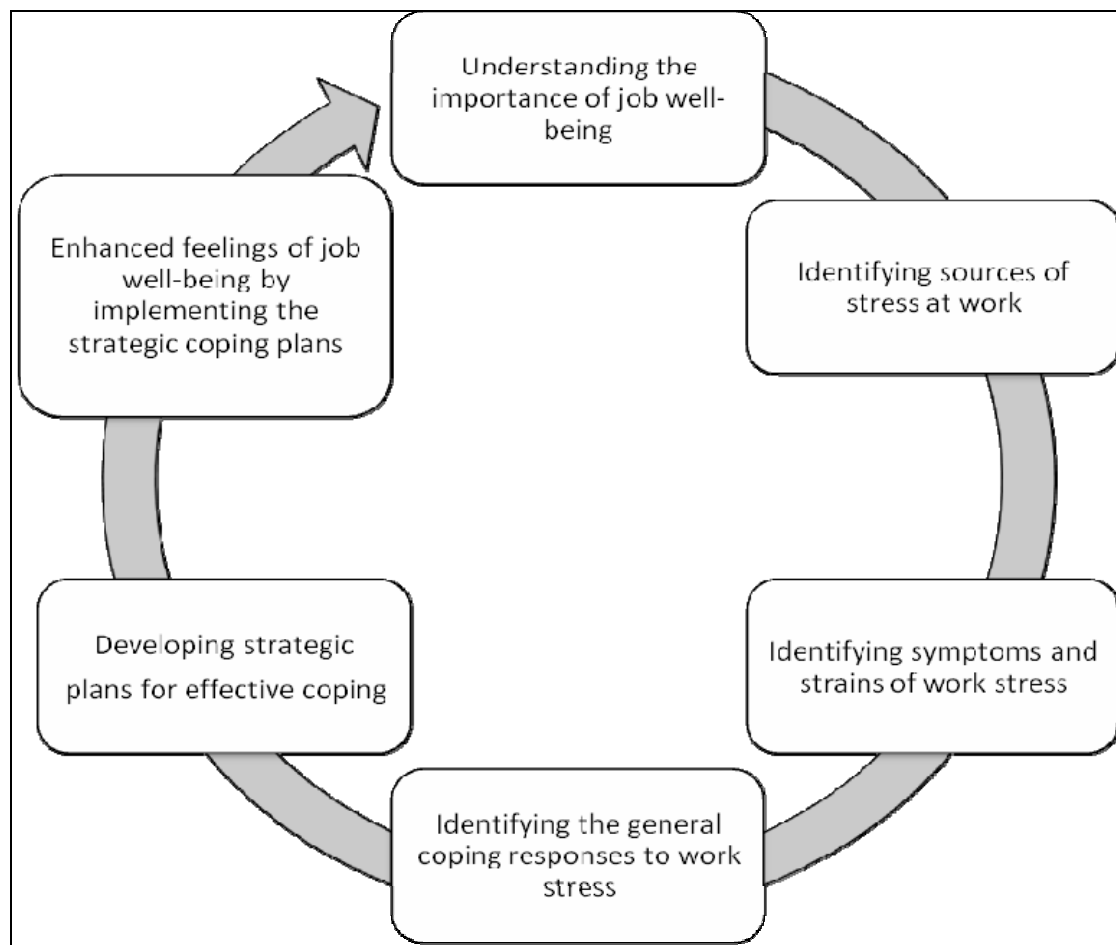
This research project was structured for creating awareness about job well-being and its enhancement through the strategic development of effective coping among international school teachers using the action research methodology. The information accrued from the action research cycle has been consolidated, shared, discussed and interpreted in this chapter.

The participants went through the four action research cycles. With the objectives in perspective, the researcher facilitated and guided the research. Group discussions were held to involve the participants to discuss and share their views about the planned agenda. Personal interviews, participant feedbacks and participants as well as the researcher's reflections added to the information. After each meeting and end of each cycle, information was consolidated, reviewed and planning was done for the next cycle.

This chapter represents all the findings from the participants collected through various methods. The interpretation of the findings has been discussed along with this. The flow of information obtained from the participants has been represented in the sequence as depicted below:

1. Identification of the factors impeding the feelings of happiness at school i.e. identifying the '*work stressors*'.
2. Ascertaining the negative impacts of work stress on self and interpersonal relationships
3. Sharing the coping responses generally employed by the teachers to deal with their work related stress.
4. Strategic planning to enable the teachers to cope effectively with the work related stress: Identifying the strategic plans to cope better both on the individual/ personal level and as a group/ organizational level.
5. Identification of the areas of school improvement that have an impact on the teachers' well-being
6. An observation regarding the feelings of job well-being of the participants.

The flow of information and findings in this action research project has been represented in the figure 7.



**Figure 7** Sequential Flow of Information in the Research

The following segments in the chapter present the findings in the sequence as mentioned above. The section wise findings are attached in the appendix I for detailed information to the readers. The consolidated information was gathered through the various sources during the course of the project implementation. For reporting the information obtained from the three groups, they are coded and represented as:

Kindergarten section as: KGS

Elementary section as: ELS

Secondary section as: SRS

## **1. IDENTIFICATION OF THE WORK STRESSORS**

The teachers started the action research process of finding the meaning of happiness by first focusing attention on what actually impedes this. The participants met in their section groups. They had group discussions followed by individual feedbacks to identify the sources of work stress.

It is important to note once again that though this was not the main research objective, yet the participants themselves desired to first recognise their sources of work stress. This step itself has importance in the “coping process”. Lazarus (1984) has emphasized that primary appraisal is an essential aspect of coping behaviour.

Using the content analysis guidelines the information obtained has been categorized the identified sources of work stress in to six categories which are related to the work itself, the students, resource limitations, lack of management support, school policy and interpersonal relationships at work.

### **1.1 Work**

The “work” in itself is the perceived stress related to the inherent characteristics of the work. For instance the kindergarten teachers shared that they “experience a pressure of time to complete activities at school”. They also shared that they find that “the curriculum and books are not appropriate for each class level”. The elementary teachers expressed that “unscheduled activities during the year” divert them from the task of teaching. They also shared that there was a “lack of common curriculum planning” to link the kindergarten classes with the elementary and them to the secondary school.

### **1.2 Students**

The teachers identified a major source of stress due to the students, their abilities and their behaviour. The kindergarten teachers reported that the “new admissions in between a school term” puts pressure on the teachers as they have to start the academic lessons from the beginning with the new student. The elementary teachers shared that they often experience stress due to “lack of student interest” and the student’s indiscipline and behaviour. This was also supported by the secondary school teachers who also put “student behaviour” as a major source of stress. The secondary teachers elaborated this discussion by mentioning that the

students were perceived as stressful due to the “lack of proper foundation for some of them”, “language problem” and a “wide disparity in their learning abilities”.

### **1.3 Resource Limitation**

Another source of stress has been categorized as the lack of resources necessary for the working of the teachers. The kindergarten teachers did not mention any thing in this category. However the elementary teachers shared that they did perceive “lack of teaching resources” and lack of “proper science lab” to be stressful as these prevented them for making teaching more creative. The secondary teachers also shared that they felt it was stressful to teach without “proper infrastructure” at school and also some times the “physical appearance of the classrooms” was depressing too. They also highlighted the lack of proper scientific lab provisions for the students.

### **1.4 Lack of Management Support**

Another category of stress was due to the perceived lack of management support. This factor was highlighted by the elementary teachers who mentioned that they felt demoralized at times due to “lack of appreciation for their work” from the school’s management and “unequal distribution of work” by the school head.

### **1.5 School Policy**

Problems in a clear school policy also attributed to perceived stress. The elementary teachers said that they feel the policy of “not having exams for classes 1 and 2” created problems in their efforts to build up the academic knowledge of the students. The secondary teachers also highlighted that the “improper planning” for the school calendar and curriculum lead to many perceived problems for the teachers.

### **1.6 Interpersonal Relationships at Work**

The last category of stressors was identified as interpersonal problems. The kindergarten teachers shared that “communication problems with colleagues” lead to stress at work. The elementary teachers expressed similar view by sharing that “being misunderstood by colleagues” created stress at times. The secondary teachers highlighted another area of

interpersonal problems, “communication problems from management to teachers and staff, teachers to staff, and among various school sections”.

Table 5 represents the summary of the work stressors identified by the international school teachers who participants in the action research.

**Table 5** Work Stressors Identified by Teachers at School

<b>Sources of Work Stress</b>	<b>Example (as reported by participants)</b>
Work Itself	Unscheduled activities, Inappropriate books and curriculum
Students	Disparity in learning ability, Lack of interest
Resource limitation	Lack of teaching support materials, lack of proper science laboratories
Lack of management support	Lack of appreciation, Unequal distribution of work
School policies	Proper planning of calendar, uniform policies for all needed.
Interpersonal relationships at work	Misunderstandings with colleagues

As evident from the above findings, teachers do experience stress in their work place. The concept of stress among teachers has been identified and acknowledged by researchers. Teacher stress is defined by Kyriacou (1987) as “the experience by a teacher of unpleasant emotions, such as tension, frustration, anxiety, anger, and depression, resulting from aspects of work as a teacher”. In a review of international research, Jarvis (2002), had written that “teacher stress is a real phenomenon and that high levels are reliably associated with a range of causal factors, including those intrinsic to teaching, individual vulnerability and systemic influences”.

When reviewed the factors identified by the teachers in this study, some of these sources of stress were related to work influences like the work itself, the students; other to the systemic influences like resource limitations, lack of management support, and the school policy.

As reported by the teachers, the work itself sometimes becomes a source of stress. Research shows that workload is often cited as the most stressful for teachers (Jarvis, 2002).

Another factor mentioned by teachers is their interpersonal relationship with the school management. This finding is supported by Buunk et al. (1998), who had found that the factor of “interpersonal conflict at work” is very stressful and is accompanied by high levels of strain.

The focus on identifying stressors by teachers has practical relevance. Research evidence exists to verify that teaching is a particularly stressful occupation, and the stressful aspects of teaching also lead to extreme negative outcomes like burnout and turnover (Russell, Altmaier, & Velzen, 1987). The identification of work stressors in this research corroborates other research based information.

Thus, this was the first step in the research process that went on to help in initiating the awareness about the existence of stress at work for teachers as the road block on their path towards being “happy at work”.

## **2. NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF WORK STRESS**

The teachers had reported that they experience stress at school and identified the sources of this work stress too. To stimulate the thinking of participants further about the need to cope better with work demands, I then asked them to understand and identify the negative impacts of work stress. We again followed the process of individual reflections and group sharing to discuss and elaborate this.

The information shared by the teacher participants about the impacts of work stress were classified in to 4 main categories - on self, interactions with students, family relationships and relationship with others.

The teachers could easily identify the effects of stress on their physical and emotional well-being. The physical symptoms of stress were identified as having “back aches” and “sleeping problems” by the kindergarten teachers. Some of the elementary teachers reported “headaches” and problems in sleeping. The secondary teachers shared that they also experienced headaches, problems in back, neck and eyes and also high blood pressure. Other problems reported were mood swings, lack of energy, irritability and anxiety.

The teachers also described that experience of stress had impact on their relationships and behaviour with students. They mentioned that when under stress they were “not able to help the students” as reported the kindergarten teachers. The teachers stated that their behaviour towards students was “harsh and less patient”. For instance the elementary



teachers explained that they “felt like doing nothing at all” with their students. Secondary teachers described that when under stress they were “annoyed with the questions” the students asked and also ignored them.

The experience of stress also influenced how the teacher behaved with his/her family and friends. They reported a tendency to carry the negative impact of stress home and the result was evident on their behaviour with their children, spouse and even friends. One secondary teacher shared that “we carry the stress home...sometimes we get angry with our own children”. The elementary teachers reported the impact of stress on them as so powerful that “we don’t feel like doing household chores like cooking meals” or “don’t feel like teaching my children”. The kindergarten teachers shared that when under stress they are less patient and withdraw themselves.

The teachers also shared that the experience of stress leads to “self withdrawal” and a tendency to “run away from others”.

The table 6 depicts the summarized impacts of stress on various levels as reported by the participant teachers.

**Table 6** Negative Impacts of Work Stress

<b>Negative Impact of stress felt on</b>	<b>Problems Areas</b>
Self	Physical, and emotional problems
Interactions with students	Difficulties in communication, & teaching, Overall behaviour
Family relationships	Problem in interactions, social behaviour
Other areas	Loss of interest, Withdrawal from activities

The wide spread impacts of stress are also well recognised in research. Russell, Altmaier, and Velzen (1987) have reported that the stressful aspects of teaching also leading to extreme negative outcomes like burnout. As also indicated by the previous research findings (Mohan, 2007) the international school teachers experience high levels of ‘perceived work stress’ which has direct and significant influence on their job well-being. As an individual identifying the areas impacted by the negative influence of stress is important. You can then

take some measure to undo the negative results by taking some positive direction of mitigating the stress in one's life.

Thus, it becomes imperative to understand that stress has far reaching impacts on not just the individual but also his/her relationships with the others around him/her.

### **3. GENERAL COPING RESPONSES OF THE TEACHERS**

After the teachers had been able to identify the sources of their work stress and also understand the negative impacts of this stress, they were encouraged to think about what they did generally to cope with this work stress.

It's rather interesting to note that most of them mentioned that they are able to cope and deal with their work related outcomes. To explain this we quote one of the teachers who mentioned very aptly to describe this: "I am able to cope with the work stress...had it not been so I would not have been in the same profession after more than fifteen years".

At this stage in the project I asked them to share what actually they did to cope with the work pressures. The responses that they shared were ranging from doing some other activity to avoiding thinking about the problem.

Being a teacher and continuing in the same profession, each individual learns to employ some form of coping with the stress. When asked to share what they did generally to deal with work related stress, the teachers gave various feedbacks which was categorized in to two broad groups- strategies dealing with self and others using interpersonal support. For the individual coping strategies the teachers used a wide range such as doing meditation, praying, listening to music, dancing. They also relied on interpersonal support of friends.

As we summarize the information obtained about the coping behaviour employed by these teachers we can classify the responses according to the various categories identified by researchers. Folkman and Lazarus (1980) have contributed to the understanding of coping behaviour state that basically coping strategies can be categorized in to two general types- emotion focused (strategies to reduce or manage the emotional distress) and problem focused strategies (aimed at solving the problem of stress). An overview about the different categories has been given in chapter 2 during the literature review. Using this categorization, the kindergarten teachers used emotion focused strategy to avoid the problem by "sleeping it off"

or “window shopping”. The problem focused strategy may be defined what an elementary teacher did- “try to think of strategies for better class control” or kindergarten teacher’s strategy to “think and find a solution to the problem causing stress”.

The table 7 represents the categorization of the information obtained from the participants.

**Table 7** Categories of Coping Responses Generally Employed

Emotion Focused Coping Responses	Problem Focused Coping Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sleeping it off</li> <li>● Going window shopping</li> <li>● Watching television</li> <li>● Avoiding to think about school</li> <li>● Meditating</li> <li>● Dancing</li> <li>● Seeking social support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Try to think of better class control</li> <li>● Think to find solution to the problem causing stress</li> </ul>

As can be seen from the table above, most of the coping responses utilized were based on emotion focused coping. After the teachers shared and discussed their coping strategies and heard the other participants share theirs, we moved on to the next activity linked to project objective.

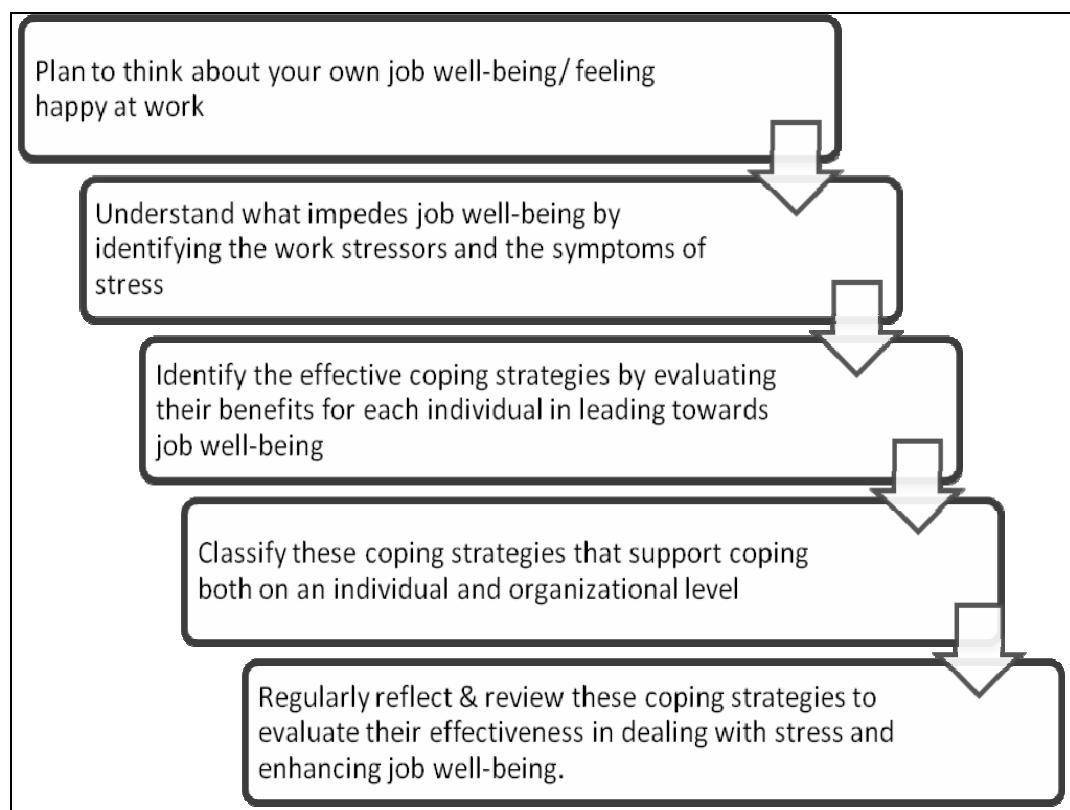
#### **4. STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR EFFECTIVE COPING BY THE TEACHERS**

In the cyclical process to create awareness and evolve strategic coping plans for each individual, the participants went ahead to discuss and find out the coping strategies that may be effective in dealing with the work related stress. During this process of group discussions the teacher participants actively shared their experiences with others. The researcher gave them some reading materials (attached in appendix) on effective coping behavior, and they also decided to implement some strategies for positive thinking.

The teacher participants were encouraged to develop strategic plans for enhancing coping. To understand the focus on strategic planning we must understand the term strategy.

Wikipedia quotes that “A Strategy is a long term plan of action designed to achieve a particular [goal](#), most often ‘winning’. Strategy is differentiated from [tactics](#) or immediate actions with resources at hand by its nature of being extensively premeditated, and often practically rehearsed. Strategies are used to make the problem easier to understand and solve.”

The overview of the process by which teachers planned strategically to enhance coping with work stress is depicted in figure 8.



**Figure 8** Strategic Planning for Enhancing Coping

During this process of strategic planning the teachers first identified the coping strategies. Then the teachers discussed the various strategies which they felt enabled them to cope with effectively with work stress at school. The strategies identified were sorted out into two categories, one to be used by the teachers working in the school on an individual or personal level and the other that they may be used in a group or at the school/ organizational level.

The following section represents the findings from the discussions of the participant teachers in the sequence:

- 4.1. Individual / personal level coping strategies
  - 4.1.1 Personal plans of the participants
  - 4.1.2 An overview of individual coping strategies
- 4.2. Group/ organizational level coping strategies
- 4.3 Implication of the findings

#### **4.1. INDIVIDUAL / PERSONAL LEVEL COPING STRATEGIES**

The individual strategies for effective coping were recommended by the teachers through individual reflections and during the group discussions. The teachers reviewed the effectiveness of the strategies for their personal level. The findings suggest that some of the strategies suggested by the teachers are common such as meditation, relaxation, listening to music, eating healthy and doing exercise. However, each teacher decided what was best suited to his/her own needs.

##### **4.1.1 Personal Plans of the Participants**

The following section takes a review of the “personal coping plan” of each participant. For the reporting purpose the researcher has shared the coping plan of each individual and grouped the individuals according to the school sections that they work in. Each participant’s information was collected by the researcher through the techniques of self report / reflections and interviews, and consolidated for the description below.

##### **Kindergarten section**

As mentioned earlier there were three participants from the kindergarten section of the school.

Participant 1: With the participation in the project at school, she modified her usually coping strategy of listening to music and made a coping plan to start exercising each day. She was so happy with the change that she inspired her colleague, who lives near her apartment to also start exercising with her each day. She also has started taking care of her food and has

reduced her evening meals. She shared that she has “learnt a lot...this project has been wonderful”.

Participant 2: She has enjoyed reading the handouts given during the project and looks forward to getting more of such material. Her previous coping strategies included window shopping and spending time with friends when possible. She shared that she has decided to be positive towards herself and especially enjoy “practicing the exercise in gratitude and smiling at one self at the end of each day”. She has also decided to spend at least one evening each week with her friends. She also mentioned that she is trying to go for walks 2-3 times a week.

Participant 3: This participant had shown a high state of awareness for dealing with stress at the beginning of this project. She does meditation on a regular basis. She reflected that with the project participation she expressed that “I have started to spend more time to think positively about myself and my happiness”. She also mentioned that she enjoyed the project as we “systematically explored the stress at work”. She went on to share that during the course of the project she has changed her food habits and eats fruits, yoghurt and salads for meals.

### **Elementary section**

This section had five participants in the project.

Participant 4: The participant informed me that she was using the coping strategy of praying daily. With the project she conveyed that awareness was initiated in her thinking as we went ahead with the project participation and doing exercises on self reflection, gratitude and spending time each day to think about one self. She mentioned that “I feel positive after spending time in the project. I understand the importance of time for my self.”

Participant 5: He has been a very active participant and a source of fun and laughter for the group meetings. He shared an interesting coping strategy which not only we shared with his group but also with the other groups. The strategy was to give one self a big smile in the mirror each day. He told me that “I am happy that I am able to refresh myself with this project as I have a keen interest in self improvement and have also attended seminars for this”. He says his strategy for self acceptance strengthens his resolve to have a positive attitude. His

other effective coping techniques include exercising on alternate days, eating healthy by avoiding soft drinks and sweets.

Participant 6: This participant gave details about her experience in the project telling me that “I feel good...I am happy to meet everyone here”. She conveyed that she felt happy to give her feedbacks about her feelings at the school. She has incorporated one strategy for her self in her daily life- to go for daily walks. During these walks she took time to think about her self too. She is also trying to change her habit of sleeping late and tries to get adequate rest.

Participant 7: When we began the project, this participant stated very clearly that she does not have any time to devote to herself. Later on she tried to spend time to self reflect at night time. She described that with this “I have started to get negative thoughts”. If no specific coping strategy was adopted by her, she shared that this process has ignited a spark of self reflection in her. She also told that just the chance to come for project meetings and share her feelings made her feel better. Another strategy she is inculcating is the habit of taking short walks each day.

Participant 8: The participant described that does not want to spend time to think about herself or stress at school. She shared that “I try to leave all stress at school”. After we had discussed the importance of developing strategies to cope better, she has joined a yoga course. She said that the yoga practice brings her calmness and peace. On weekends she goes for long walks.

### **Secondary section**

The secondary section had four participants in the action research project.

Participant 9: This participant mentioned at the beginning of the project that she has no time to spend for herself. She shared that “maybe when my kids get settled I will be able to improve my habits”. However, she mentioned that this project “is a good start to share our thoughts and it is a way to release stress”. During the project duration, some one died in her family and she could not participate in the project for almost a week. Her case was an

exception. However she did come back for the final discussions and she mentioned that she tried to practice relaxation before going to bed.

Participant 10: She was one of the most enthusiastic participants and gave me full support and encouragement to go ahead with the project. She shared that her personal coping strategies included “a time spent for myself regularly...I reflect and think about my self. I go shopping and take care to look good and feel good. I spend time playing with my children at home. I play basketball and I feel I am very different person at home...I let my hair down!” She told me that the project was really good for the participants since “it allowed us to systematically explore the dynamics of stress and happiness at work”. She went ahead to share that the school management should be able to gain from the information gathered and the feedbacks should be taken care of for the improvement of the school.

Participant 11: He was a very vocal participant and even volunteered to give personal interviews for the project. His coping plan has included a “time for self reflection each day”, eating healthy, and developing a hobby after the school hours. He exercises 3 times a week. He mentioned that for him it has been “personally enjoyable to be a part of the project”. He went on to emphasize that “we should share the message of this project”. He feels responsible for him self and takes time daily to reflect on his reactions, his feelings and his behaviour.

Participant 12: This was a senior teacher at school. For her coping has been part of her learning and continuing with this teaching profession. She relies on daily prayers and also finding another interest, a hobby not related to school. She finds that listening to music and dancing helps her to deal with the work related stress.

#### **4.1.2 An Overview of Individual Coping Strategies**

Taking an overview of the individual coping strategies identified by the participants they can be viewed as related to maintaining a balance between both mind and body. After the individual and group discussions for identifying effective coping strategies, the teachers were prompted to focus on “themselves” and developing their plan for better coping. Through the reading materials and individual reflections the researcher encouraged them to think about “self



as the source for their own happiness". After the end of the previous research cycle, they were given reflection journals (appendix E to H) so that they may be encouraged to think about their own coping plans. This process also continued in a spiral fashion as we planned during our meetings, then acted to put the coping skills in practice, they observed their own behaviour and reflected along with the researcher to find the efficacy of their coping plans.

Table 8 shows that the coping strategies recommended and adopted by the teachers were related to balancing both mind and body.

**Table 8** Mind-Body Categorization of Coping Strategies

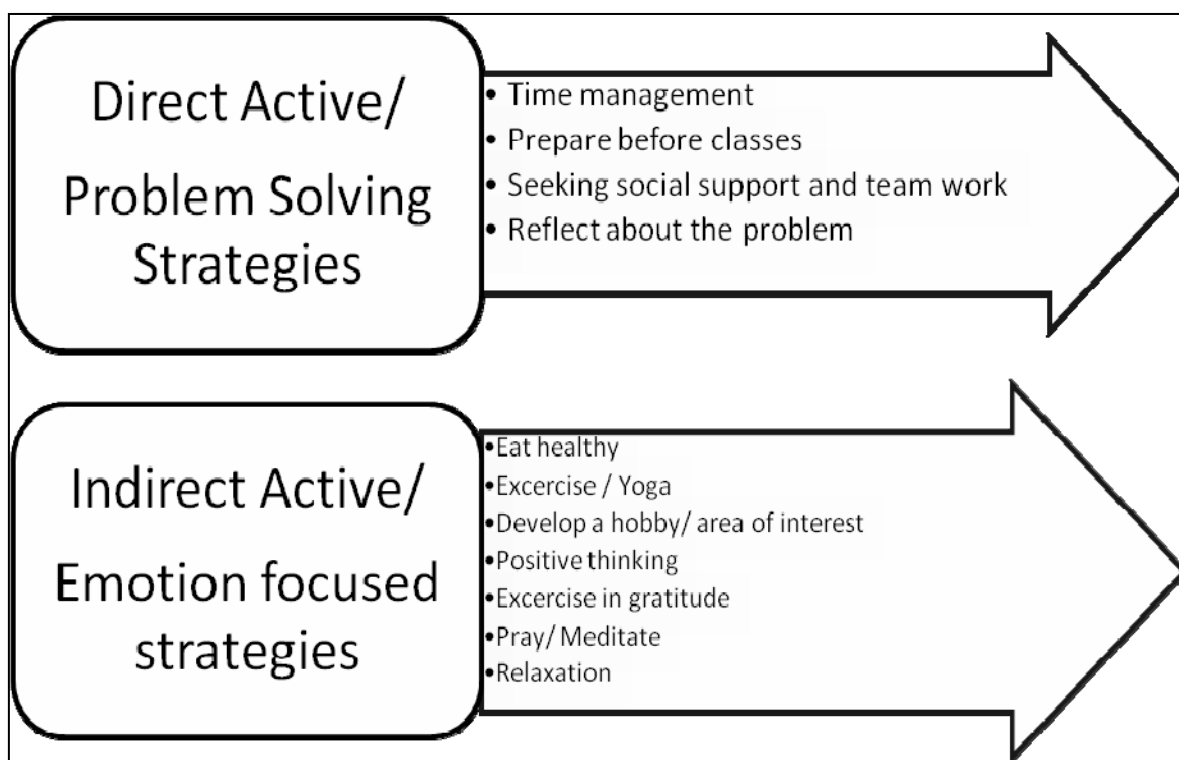
Coping Strategy Related to	Example
Mind	Relaxation ("self reflection and meditation") Positive thinking ("give oneself a smile each day") Problem solving ("manage your time well")
Body	Eating healthy ("avoiding fried and spicy food, or too much sugar"), Eating in moderation, Doing some form of exercise ("aerobics, dancing, going for walks")

To understand what these coping strategies imply in terms of the coping research we will once again refer to the theories shared in chapter 2 of the thesis. The theory by Folkman and Lazarus (1984) stated that there are two kinds of coping strategies- problem-focused and emotion focused coping strategies. The problem- focused coping, is aimed at problem solving or doing something to alter the source of the stress such as the response shared by participants about better "time management" at school. The emotion- focused coping, is aimed at reducing or managing the emotional distress that is associated with the situation. For instance teachers recommended doing some form of "mental relaxation" and "self reflection" each day is an effective emotion focused coping strategy.

Another classification has been put forward by Pines and Aronson (1988) who identified direct active and indirect active strategies that employees can use to more effectively manage stress. According to them when teachers use direct active coping strategies, they

directly intervene with the source of the stress in a way that minimizes the stressful situation. In the current findings, we can relate the teachers' strategies of dealing with the work related problem at school and managing their time well are the "direct active strategies". The authors have also stated that "when teachers use indirect active coping strategies, they attempt to reduce their stress by releasing it or engaging in activities known to reduce stress". The current findings show that the teachers identified the "indirect active" strategies of eating healthy, exercising, developing a hobby and praying. These strategies do not, attempt to change the source of the stress but make the individual feel better.

With these two broad categories in perspective, the responses of the participants may be classified in the current research as "active problem solving" strategies and "indirect emotion focused" strategies. These are depicted in figure 9.



**Figure 9** Classifying Personal Coping Strategies

As reviewed from the above process the teachers evaluated the strategies evolved and reflected about the efficacy of what technique would work for them. Researchers such as Pines and Aronson (1988) point out that the active coping strategies are considerably more

effective in managing stress. A change in cognition is also very important for coping with stress. The theory of 'cognitive restructuring' by Seaward (1999) supports this stance since he says this means changing a perception from a negative interpretation to a neutral or positive one, making it less stressful. The teacher participants have begun to understand that this is the way that leads towards feeling happy at work.

When discussing about individual level coping, the findings reveal that teachers have recommended using some cognitive strategies like reading positive materials, developing positive attitude towards self, diverting your thinking through developing an interest other than the school. According to Jarvis (2002) a substantial body of contemporary research has examined the cognitive factors affecting individual susceptibility to stress amongst teachers. So it is imperative to enhance coping through a change in one's cognition too.

As succinctly put forward by Feimen-Nemser and Floden (1986), when teachers are empowered as agents for change, they become "active agents rather than passive workers". Hence by developing their understanding of stress at work and evolving strategies to cope effectively the teachers are brining about a change in their own lives. They have become aware that it would be prudent for them to develop strategies to cope with stress in their teaching positions and personal lives.

#### **4.2. GROUP/ ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL COPING STRATEGIES FOR TEACHERS**

Another important findings from the research emerged when the participants decided to recommend strategies to cope with stress by involving the "group" of all teachers at school. Initially this aspect of the teachers' suggestions was not in focus in this research. However they expressed that they would like to recommend group coping strategies or "activities that they would like to do as a group in school". The teachers emphasized that they feel that their job well-being can be enhanced by engaging in activities to de-stress at the school itself. The teachers recommended that they should be given opportunity to organize activities at school in which they all may participate and lessen their work related stress as well as build the team spirit at school. Many of the activities suggested by the three groups were similar as they involved building up of social exchange among teachers and strengthening their relationships. The teachers also suggested that they themselves would like to be the resource persons for these activities.

All three groups of teachers recommended group coping activities like learning dance, music or aerobics that can be held after school hours within the school premises. The teachers expressed that the group level coping activities would not only help them to cope better with work stress but also enhance their professional development. The kindergarten teachers suggested that “once a term outings for teachers would help them to bond together”. One of the teacher’s who is practicing meditation daily even offered to help teach the other teachers who may be interested during these sessions. They also mentioned that the school management could support their professional development “by inviting some professionals or experts in the academic areas”. An interesting recommendation they shared was that there “should be such projects as this launched in the school wherein they would get to read materials on personal development”.

The elementary teachers also supported their kindergarten colleagues by recommending that outing should be arranged for the teachers and an “in-service day be created in the school calendar to provide for workshops and activities for them”. They had another suggestion to allow fair allocation of responsibilities for all teachers.

The secondary teachers also supported their other colleagues in recommending workshops for academics, art and craft to be organized at the school. They further recommended an innovative way of supporting each other’s professional growth through in formal social exchanges at school. For instance they suggested “the subject teachers can meet each other at least once a month to share and learn from each other”. They strongly felt that the “informal meeting over a cup of tea or coffee can help foster better relationships and also professional learning from each other”. These meetings could lead to discovering talents in each other and hence though could also plan to have “clubs and activities for the students based on the teachers’ resource pool”.

An active participation of the teachers ensured that they recommend strategies that could be feasible and can be put in to practice. The teachers recognized that these strategies could have an impact on helping them cope better with the work related stress. Researchers have established that effective coping strategies reduce workplace related stress. In a research on teachers Steffes and Valentine (1996) found that effective coping behaviour is related to

positive teacher outcomes. Hence, we were moving in the direction of enhancing their well-being at the work place.

### **4.3 IMPLICATION OF THE FINDINGS**

The strategically planned coping recommendations from the teacher participants have been sorted in to two categories, one to be used by the teachers on an individual level and the other that they may be use in a group or at the school level. Research evidence shared by Dunham (1994) shows that the teachers' stress management strategies and resources can be classified as "personal, interpersonal, organizational and community". If we review the findings of the current study we find corroborating evidence as the teachers identified resources and strategies which referred to them or "personal", to the school based or "organizational" and to "interpersonal" as they offered to build up resource pools for enhancing coping behavior. The "community" based strategies referred to the teachers' suggestions for inviting resource persons or experts from outside the school.

A very important aspect of the information generated by the participants of the current research has some interesting implications. This implication deals with the teachers wanting "support of school management to implement their coping activities". In a supporting evidence by Pines and Aronson (1988) have emphasized that district and school administrators are ultimately responsible for reducing stress in the school environment. They express that expecting teachers to better manage their stress in an unsupportive environment where clear role expectations do not exist is an unproductive approach to resolving teacher burnout problems. Hence, efforts by the management to create more productive, caring, clearly defined work situations and improve teachers' skills are the best prevention against teacher stress. This is evident by the expectations of the participants in this research. But more importantly the suggestions of the participants were also put into practice by the school's management. So the action research based learning of the teachers was supported and enhanced.

From the shared experiences we can conclude that there is no one specific coping plan that may be recommended for international school teachers. However, as we review the findings we see that the teachers use a variety of coping strategies and they recommended that best coping practice would be to reach for a mind-body balance.

If we take a review of the research evidence available for stress management we find that the first step in developing an effective coping plan for each individual involves the awareness and acceptance that “stress” exists and it influences his/her well-being. Participants can later be trained to improve their coping behaviour by developing some strategies which are applicable to their specific case. In addition to training participants in physiological and/or situational coping strategies, the experiments of Forman (1981), and Pines and Aronson (1983) emphasize the importance of cognitive appraisal and re-appraisal. Strategies for changing how one thinks about stressful or stress-producing situations, i.e., cognitive coping strategies, are an important component that leads to the reduction or prevention of stress.

Dunham (1994) too has carried out a number of researches and workshops on stress management and he concludes that coping has two main function- either to change the situation which stressful or to modify a person’s perception of the situation.

In their review about teacher burnout, Buschman and Gamsjäger (1999) recommended that active coping skills help teachers to deal effectively with their work stress. The review of the coping plans in the above section shows that most teachers who actively developed their coping plans include active coping strategies in those.

In their research synthesis on coping with teacher stress, Brown and Uehara (1999) highlight that coping strategies such as stress awareness, physiological training, environment adjustment and mind control are effective in dealing with the stress.

To sum up the coping plans of the research participants I would like to highlight some of the coping skills that they recommended are doing meditation or some form of mental relaxation, eating a balanced diet, doing physical exercise, developing an interest such as dancing and adopting a positive attitude. In the end a successful coping plan is actually a dynamic one which allows the teacher to review, reflect, modify and practice it to deal effectively with the stress that has arisen. Just as the causes of stress are varying, their perception by the individual also differs, and the coping plan to deal with the stress would also vary for each individual. But now the participants had gone through an action research process and were equipped to systematically analyse the stress at work as well as evolve their strategies to deal with it.

## **5. AREAS OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IDENTIFIED BY THE PARTICIPANTS**

An important and highly involved discussion emerged from the three groups to identify areas of school improvement. The teachers expressed that the changes or improvement in these areas have a direct impact on their job well-being.

This information was not designed to be a part of the research but emerged as the action research process was implemented. The teachers in all the three groups were very enthusiastic to share their feedbacks about school improvement with the school management. The management too was keen to identify the school improvement areas. In fact even as the researcher shared the teachers' feedbacks with them, they started to implement the suggestions. This had a positive impact on the participants as they perceived a "validation" of their participation in the project.

After the group discussions and individual interviews the researcher consolidated the recommended areas of change in the school. These were categorized into five broad areas of school planning, school policies, professional development, personal development and social support activities. The section wise details are attached in the appendix which depicts the basic categories and the recommendations by the teachers.

Some of the suggestions given by the three groups were in the common areas, while the other suggestions were specific to the school section. The identified areas have been categorized into five broad areas and the recommendations of the participants are discussed for each of the categories below.

### **5.1 School Planning**

The recommendations related to the school planning were in the areas of improving resources and curriculum planning. The kindergarten and elementary groups of teachers both suggested that school should focus on improving the resources available and regular maintenance of the existing facilities. The elementary teachers also suggested that the school head should allocate responsibilities to them at the end of the school year so that they may prepare themselves before the academic year began. The secondary section recommended that even the activities for the students should be prepared before the school year began so that they do not waste time in between. Hence all the suggestions were based on improving the school functioning by planning before the actual school term began.

## **5.2 School Policies**

The participants discussed and recommended that there should be “fixed and fair school policies” which the management and school head implement. The kindergarten suggested that the school should facilitate frequent trips for students and provide administrative support for their work. They also recommended provision for teachers to access internet resources. The elementary teachers said that one area needing improvement was the equal and fair allocation of work to all the teachers, which also ensured equal opportunities for all to share their expertise and talents. They also had another suggestion- for the management to evolve fixed and clear student discipline and rules. The secondary teachers supported their colleagues in recommending that all teachers should be involved in the school planning, curriculum building and implementing.

## **5.3 Professional Development**

The teachers actively supported the need for getting support for their professional development at school. All groups recommended that professional development workshops should be arranged for them during the school term. While kindergarten teachers suggested inviting professional from outside and secondary teachers also emphasized on interactions with others, the elementary teachers supported them and added that they should also be provided opportunities to learn special crafts and activities to teach the students. Secondary teachers went on to highlight that “each teacher has a special talent” and they should be given chance to share and learn from each other too.

## **5.4 Personal Development**

All the three groups strongly recommended that seminars and workshops be arranged for their personal development. The kindergarten teachers appreciated working on this project and the reading materials provided to them. The elementary teachers shared that they feel that such a project as the one they were participating in “provided an outlet to the stress”. The secondary teachers supported this by recommending an informal sharing amongst teachers after the school hours to learn personal skills and share their talents.

## **5.5 Social Support Activities**

The teacher participants have recommended provision of social activities at school not only as the means to enhance their coping but also to share and learn from each other. The activities such dance-music-singing-aerobics or meditation provided an excellent opportunity to



“de-stress” and enhance “cross cultural sharing” as the secondary teacher pointed out. The elementary teachers suggested that the school calendar should provide for these meetings.

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, the activity to identify areas of school improvement was initially not a research objective. During the course of the action research project the teacher participants suggested that they would like to identify the areas of school improvement as they feel that the school improvement had a direct link with their own job well being. In a review of research on stress among teachers, Gulwadi (2006) has mentioned that not enough evidence indicates the influence about the schoolteachers’ environments on their stress. However, this research provided evidence that the conceived improvement in the school environment does influence the perceived well-being of teachers. The summarized version of these feedbacks from the teachers was depicted in table 9.

**Table 9** Areas of School Improvement

<b>Area of School Improvement</b>	<b>Sub-area Identified</b>
Planning	Resource allocation, curriculum planning, school calendar planning
School policies	Fixed and fair policies, Student discipline policy, Policy for allocation of work
Professional development	Learn special skills/crafts, Resource persons called for professional learning
Personal development	Provide skills for personal development, Allow teachers to learn from each other on an informal basis
Social support activities	Provide opportunities for social/ informal exchange among teachers at school, Cross cultural exchange among colleagues

There are two main advantages of this information that the teachers generated:

i) The information obtained has been shared with the school head and the school management and some of the feedbacks have already been implemented at school. This leads to an improvement in the actual working of the school.

ii) This not only benefits the school improvement process but also the commitment of the teachers who had participated in this information generation.

There are some researchers who have investigated the work environment impacts on the teachers and the consequent teacher stress. Belief that the work environment is a causal factor that contributes to teachers' stress was supported by the action research of Milstein and Golaszewski (1985). They identified an effective, three-phase organizational intervention for reducing stress: teachers and administrators clarify specific stress related issues at school; cooperatively establish specific goals; and develop and implement strategies to alleviate or modify structures, processes, and behaviors.

In another study in a large educational institution, Golembiewski, Hilles and Daly (1987) studied an organizational intervention for human resources staff who became involved in their own stress diagnosis and treatment. Program features included the following activities: (a) listing three things that staff like about their department; (b) listing three "concerns" that they want to change; and (c) discussing the concerns. These steps then resulted in confronting their supervisor with the concerns, and developing—through consensus—a career progression plan for the company. This also supports the findings of the current action research initiative of the teacher participants.

The school improvement areas identified by the teachers in this study are supported by other research findings too. It is rather interesting to note that Kyriacou (2001) who lead a major research on "teacher stress" offers the following advice for schools to prevent teacher stress and burnout:

- Consult with teachers on matters, such as curriculum development or instructional planning.
- Provide adequate resources and facilities to support teachers in their instructional practice.
- Provide clear job descriptions and expectations
- Establish and maintain open lines of communication between teachers and administrators to provide administrative support and performance feedback that may act as a buffer against stress.

- Allow for and encourage professional development activities such as mentoring and networking, which may engender a sense of accomplishment and a more fully developed professional identity for teachers.

Thus, after this section it may be noted that not only was this activity of “identifying the areas of school improvement” perceived important by the teachers to their wellbeing, but it actually provided the relevant feedback for the school management to develop their school improvement plans. Hence, this research feedback provided an important link from research to action and vice versa.

The research objectives lead to action through which the teachers’ evolved ideas of school improvement and these ideas were later on shared with the school management and head. As the researcher continued to work at this school even after the project was over, the participant teachers and the researcher observed that the school head and management implemented several of these research recommendations. Among the main recommendations that were implemented were:

1. Taking the teachers for an outing/ an overnight trip
2. Involving teachers in curriculum planning and change
3. Involving teachers in planning for books and resources for the next year
4. Allocating of class room and subject duties to the teachers before they left for vacation at the end of this school term.
5. Allocating proper time for student activities in the next year’s school calendar
6. Planning for teachers’ training during the next academic year.

Though the action research project has involved only a few teachers, yet its impact was significant. This research was successful in the supporting the process of school improvement and change.

## **6. FEEDBACKS AND REFLECTIONS OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

This section consolidates and shares the reflections and feedbacks from the participants to provide an insight in to the impact of the action research project. These observations were obtained from the participants during the last sessions of personal interviews held with them. Since this action research was based on achieving objectives that can be

measured qualitatively, the feedbacks from the participants were vital in understanding the impact of the action research.

The reflections and feedbacks relate the experiences of the participants of this research. As an applied researcher it was imperative from my perspective to “measure” or understand the influence of this research in reaching out to the participants and also obtaining the desired objectives. Towards the end of the last cycle as the researcher met the participants through individual interviews asked them some specific questions such as: “How do you feel about focusing your feelings and spending time to think about yourself? Do you any feedbacks or special observations about the experience of working on this project?”

The responses from all the teachers have been grouped in to the three sections of kindergarten, elementary and secondary school participants.

#### **Kindergarten section**

Participant 1 shared that she was “influenced to think positively by the project”. It was noted that initially she was reluctant to participate but towards the end was happy to share the changes she was experiencing.

Participant 2 reflected that she “enjoys doing exercises in the project...I go home and reflect on the meetings”. She is calm and looks to be unperturbed the stress at work. She shared that she has some health problems but tries not to get stressed at work.

Participant 3 was active with her sharing especially her personal experience of the benefits of meditation. It was observed that she was quite calm despite some work permit and visa problem during the project duration. Her attitude has been quite positive towards the project.

#### **Elementary section**

Participant 4 felt that she is “able to look in to self and my own feelings”. She participated actively in the project and was very prompt with her responses and reflections sheets.

Participant 5 told me that he was “able to renew his interest in positive thinking. I felt refreshed by the project”. I have observed that he is a happy person who spread a lot of happiness around him and at the group meetings.

Participant 6 reflected “I feel good to come for such meeting...other colleagues call it the ‘happy meeting’...I hope that our feedbacks would help improve the school.” I have noted her eagerness to share and learn from the project.

Participant 7 shared that “I have avoided spending time to think about myself. This is the first time when I have been forced to think...initially I found negative thoughts surrounding me”.

Participant 8 told me that “I hope that we have shared a lot and that there would be some positive results of the project feedbacks.” She has been working at the school for long and was rather cynical about any change taking place. However, she later accepted that the project focus was “self” and not others.

### **Secondary Section**

Participant 9 shared that she felt that there was “a need for more such projects...feels good to share with each other and learn from each other”.

Participant 10 told me that he “feels responsible for his own happiness...I practice self reflection on a daily basis”. During this project he was very active and wanted to share his personal experiences as well as learning’s with others.

Participant 11 reflected that she felt “good about having such an intervention project at school”. She went on to share that she felt that the project has gone on in “professional way and we systematically explored the dynamics of happiness”. She was a deep thinker and our relationship also gained for sharing with each other.

Participant 12 was an active member of the group and she shared that she felt good about the project meetings. However she was not able to attend all the meetings as some one died in her family.

It’s perhaps not a simple task to sum up the reflections all the twelve participants in this project. To summarize the main points shared by the participants it may be concluded that:

1. The participant teachers had all shown voluntary acceptance of the project. Initially they demonstrated curiosity and gradually moved to active participation.

2. As behavioral scientists acknowledge there exist differences in each individual, which reflected in the variety of responses and the variety of strategies they employed for coping with work stress.

3. The participants reflected that during the project they had felt “happy” to share, learn and just get an opportunity to participate in the project.

4. The project had ignited a process of self awareness and stimulated the participants to think that they were responsible for their own happiness.

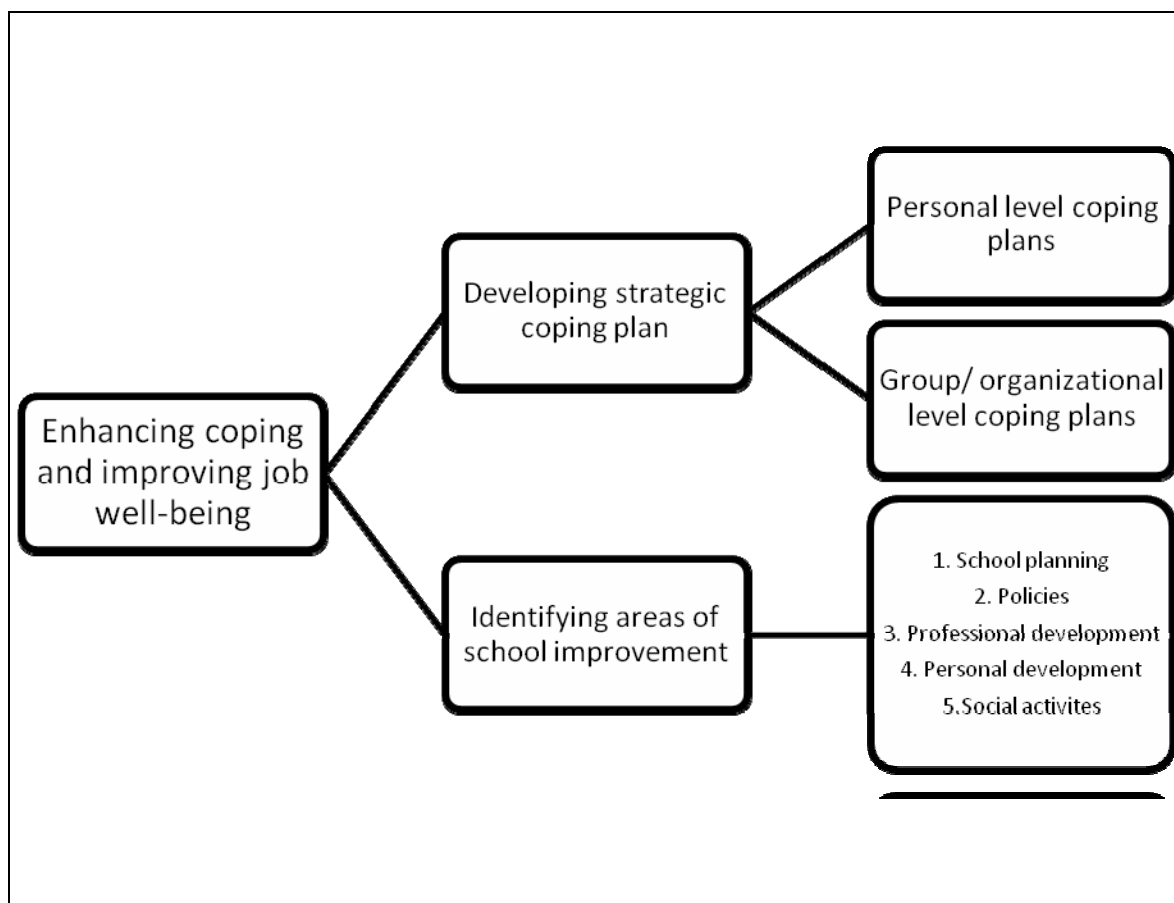
5. The project helped the participants learn about new skills and strategies for enhancing their positive thinking and dealing with work stress.

As pointed out by Dick (1997), any action research study is intended to produce both change ("action") and understanding ("research"). These two dimensions of ‘change’ in the teachers’ attitude and the school climate, and ‘understanding’ or awareness in the school teachers and the management had been the desired consequences for this research study. Even after the project ended, the participants approached me frequently to ask what we would do next. When the school year ended, they noted that their suggestions were already being implemented and the process of self improvement was leading to school improvement too. At the same time, this research led to a change in the perceptions of the researcher and facilitated enhancement in her knowledge about the job well-being of teachers.

## **CONCLUSION**

At the end of this chapter it may be reviewed that with the completion of the last action research cycle the project objectives were attained to an amount which cannot be quantified but measured only qualitatively.

The basic purpose of the project was to create awareness about the need to evolve effective coping strategies for the teachers and an understanding that this would lead towards enhancing their job well-being. The 12 teachers participated actively and shared their suggestions to evolve an understanding that how they can enhance their job well-being and coping through developing strategic coping plan and identifying areas of school improvement. The summarized depiction of the findings is represented in figure 10.



**Figure 10** Conclusion from the Main Findings

The researcher also went through a systematic reflective process and also reviewed of the endeavours to make a difference to this work place through this project. While conducting the project she played the role of an investigator, and a facilitator. Before she suggested any interventions for the participants to stimulate their thought process, she also practiced it for herself. For instance, the researcher maintained a positive reflection or a gratitude journal throughout this project.

Thus, the project awakened a desire to think about our own happiness in the context of the work place where all spend a large amount of time in their daily lives. The process was instrumental in shaping a different thought process among the teacher participants, the school management and the researcher.

Sharing a quote by Aristotle, that was also shared with the teachers in this project, seems a befitting way to end this chapter:

**Happiness depends upon our selves!**

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

This research has been professionally and academically rewarding experience. Initially, through the project, the researcher had sought to enhance her research interest along with a desire to make a worthwhile contribution to the place she worked. In retrospection, one can share that reaching the destination in this academic journey is in itself not as gratifying as the enrichment provided by the journey itself. The action research method brightened up the road on this journey as it provided the direction through collaboration and critical reflection. This research has revealed that by reaching the “destination” does not end the journey, as the journey has bestowed a new vision to all who travelled along this path- the teachers, the school management and head, and the researcher.

This study examined and reaffirmed that even as the international school teachers face the challenging task of moulding our future generations, it is also true that teaching is one of the highly demanding and often stressful professions. The intention of this research was two pronged; contributing to the understanding of the internationals school teachers' job well-being, and also to the applied aspect of behavioural science by strategically developing strategies for the teachers to cope effectively with demands of their workplace and thus enhancing their job well-being. This final chapter of the study presents the summary of findings, the applications of knowledge, the recommendations and the conclusion.

#### **SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS**

The action research project demanded a cyclical process of investigation, which has been shared in chapter 4. The next chapter 5 entailed the sequential findings from the research, and the discussion of these findings.

The twelve teachers who participated in this action research project worked in an international school in Bangkok, Thailand. For the researcher who was also working as the human resource manager at this school, this research provided an excellent opportunity to contribute to enhancing the school climate through the application of knowledge that had accrued both through her academic interest and work experience. A step wise progression was



undertaken for the participants to understand the importance of being “happy at work” and to stimulate their thinking to understand that the key to this happiness was also in their hand.

### **Main Findings of the Research**

The cyclical investigation in the current research directed a systematic action research project in which twelve teachers participated. The main findings of the research have been enumerated below.

1. Identification of the factors that impede the feelings of happiness at school (i.e. recognizing the ‘work stressors’): The teachers identified the sources of work stress and these were coded in to six categories which are related to the work itself, the students, resource limitations at school, lack of management support, school policy and interpersonal relationships at work.

2. Ascertaining the negative impacts of work stress: The participants discussed and identified four main areas of impact of work related stress, on self (physical and emotional) on interactions with students, on interpersonal relationships with family and friends.

3. Identification of the strategies generally employed by the teachers to cope with the work related stress: Most of the coping responses of the teachers were based on emotion focused coping. Though some time they did employ problem focused coping strategies.

4. Strategic planning to cope effectively with the work related stress: The teacher participants engaged in a process to strategically develop effective coping behavior. This included identifying what they can do to cope better both on the individual/ personal level and also as a group or at the organizational level. The strategic process allowed them to evaluate the stress situation at work and then implement a coping plan to deal with it.

5. Identified the areas of school improvement: The teachers expressed that the changes or improvement in some areas of the school are needed and these have a direct impact on their job well-being. These were categorized in to five broad areas of school

planning, school policies, professional development, personal development and social support activities.

6. Developed an understanding about the job well-being or “being happy at work”, and that they are responsible for their happiness at work. Through this project the participants were able to identify that effective coping leads towards enhancing their job wellbeing. They discovered a feeling of happiness in project participation and demonstrated their feelings through an active participation.

### **Attaining Research Objectives**

The research project is also reviewed in terms of achieving the ‘objectives’ of the study that had been planned prior to the study. Each of the three objectives has been under focus in this study and achieved to an extent that can be measured qualitatively.

*Objective 1: To identify the stressful work demands among international school teachers and the need to cope effectively with them.*

This objective was successfully achieved by the teachers as also shown in the research finding #1. The teachers identified the various sources of stress at their work place and also understood the importance of coping with the stress by developing and understanding of the negative impacts of the work stress.

*Objective 2: To enhance the coping skills of teachers through action research learning using strategies based on developing individual as the resource for coping.*

The teacher participants worked towards attaining this objective as is evident from the action research cycles. The teachers first shared what are the coping strategies they used generally and later on went to examine and determine the effectiveness of coping strategies. The teachers were also able to determine the activities which also may be put in to practice as a group at school. After this the teachers went on to strategically develop plans for effective coping. Most of the teachers shared that they could identify what coping strategies were effective for them. Some may not have been able to develop a plan, but they were now aware

of the need for it and about the strategic process for doing so. They had also learned that they were the resource for their own effective coping.

*Objective 3: Based on the information obtained through the implementation of the action research project, to develop recommendations for enhancing coping behaviour among teachers of an international school, leading to an increase in their job well-being.*

With reference to objective 3, what evolved from the project was that all participant teachers learnt a systematic process, based on action research technique, to strategically evolve effective coping plans. The information accrued from the project was discussed with all the three groups and finally a common meeting was held to discuss and highlight the findings. This information was also verified through individual meetings. The teachers had gone through the process to strategically develop an understanding that the effective coping practices include a combination of techniques to balance cognitive, emotional and physical dimensions. There can be no one coping plan which a teacher can use in all circumstances, but rather each individual must strategically evaluate the stress situation and then bring in to practice effective coping to deal with it. Deploying the use of strategic thinking, the participants learnt when to use a strategy, how to use and also reflect on its efficacy.

The participants developed a consciousness about the importance of coping effectively and its relationship with their job well-being. This project brought forth an understanding in the participants towards the power of their self in becoming happy at work.

Even as the project was being implemented, reports were made by the researcher and shared with the school management and school head. A final feedback report was shared it personally with the school's head and also the management's representative. This led to an important aspect of the research, the implementation of some of the feedbacks generated through the research. Hence, the participants witnessed a validation for their suggestions to improve the school and also lead towards their job well-being.

As all the information from the research project has been recorded and shared, and the objectives of the research have been fulfilled, the following sections share the final inferences as well as recommendations about how this knowledge may be useful.

### **INFERENCES FROM THE RESEARCH FINDINGS**

This research has been a powerful tool that has led to change in thinking and has enriched the experience of all the participants working on this project- the participants, the school's management and the researcher.

As the reflections and information shared by the teachers indicated, the whole action research process evolved a systematic understanding of work stress, its sources, its impacts, what may be done to deal with these and what coping plans may be effective. We may come to the conclusion from the finding that cognition is very important in coping but along with other aspects such as eating a balanced diet, having proper rest and sleep routines, and developing of special interests or hobbies.

Learning evolved from the cyclical process during the project. There was cyclical flow in the action research process rather than a linear one. The researcher in active collaboration with the participants went through a reflective process of finding information that is relevant to teachers in their work environment and that may empower them to think that they themselves are finally responsible for their own happiness. To summarize this point, we can share a thought by Benjamin Franklin that was also shared with the participants during the project:

***“Happiness depends more on the inward disposition of mind than on outward circumstances”.***

This research provided a unique and collaborative method of enhancing the coping skills of the teachers to deal effectively with work stress. Further review of literature brought into light some other research based interventions to mitigate effects of stress, which lend support and understanding the current research effort. Stress-management research conducted by various researchers such as Pines and Aronson (1983), and Long (1988) found that many successful intervention programs begin by building participants' knowledge and awareness of stress and burnout. Awareness sessions presented in a non-threatening environment provide participants with updated information about the nature, signs, causes, and symptoms of stress. One stress management training program for school psychologists focused on understanding the definition of stress by understanding the causes of stress in schools, the frequency of stress, and the effects of stress on students and teachers (Forman, 1981).

Further as one tries to assess the impact of the current research, we can refer to an interesting study by Neves de Jesus and Conboy (2001), who lead the interventions based research study for stress management among teachers. They conducted a 30-hour programme which was divided into ten sessions that included thematic exercises on a variety of topics: sharing professional experiences with colleagues, identifying specific stress factors and possible coping strategies, replacing irrational beliefs with more appropriate beliefs, analysing strategies for dealing with student discipline and motivation problems in the classroom, and practising assertiveness and relaxation. The researchers found that after the course, participating teachers showed a significant decrease in their irrational beliefs and professional distress, as well as an increase in professional motivation and the perception of wellbeing.

As mentioned earlier, the project findings were shared with school management and some findings were also implemented. Hence, this research lead to changes that were not limited to the project phase but also lead to a change process for the whole school.

### **Developing the Process for Enhancing Coping & Job Well-being**

In conclusion of this section of the study, the researcher aspires to contribute to the applied behavioral science research by sharing the process of understanding that evolved from this research. This process represents the action research based programme that an international school may refer to in order to support the human resource development by enhancing their teachers' job related well-being. This process based programme may be used a reference base for not only this school, which was the research context, but also for other schools in similar context so as to understand the work stress of teachers and to encourage them to cope better with their work demands.

The current study gives systematic evidence for building a programme to enhance coping skills among teachers and thus facilitating their happiness at work place. For such a programme to be effective, some important considerations must be taken care of which are:

1. An effective programme to augment the well-being of teachers working at the school should be envisioned within the action research based framework so as to involve the teachers themselves.
2. Such a programme must be supported by the school's leadership – its management and working head. This support is vital in making the programme a success as it

also leads to the implementation of the feedback that has evolved from the participants of the programme.

3. The facilitator of such a programme for a school must gain an insight into the actual school climate through a pilot survey before the programme is given a final shape.

4. The participation in the project should be on a voluntary basis to encourage the commitment of the teachers to the programme

5. An important aspect is a clear delineation of the project objectives, its implementation schedule and desired implications that must be shared with all the participants.

6. The flow of action in the programme should ensure that the information that is acquired from the participants would include:

i) Provide an understanding of the importance of job well-being of the teachers or what is the need to be “happy at work”.

ii) To understand the meaning of happiness, comprehend what impedes this happiness or what are the work stressors.

iii) Understand the negative impacts of work stress, on the individual and his interpersonal relationships.

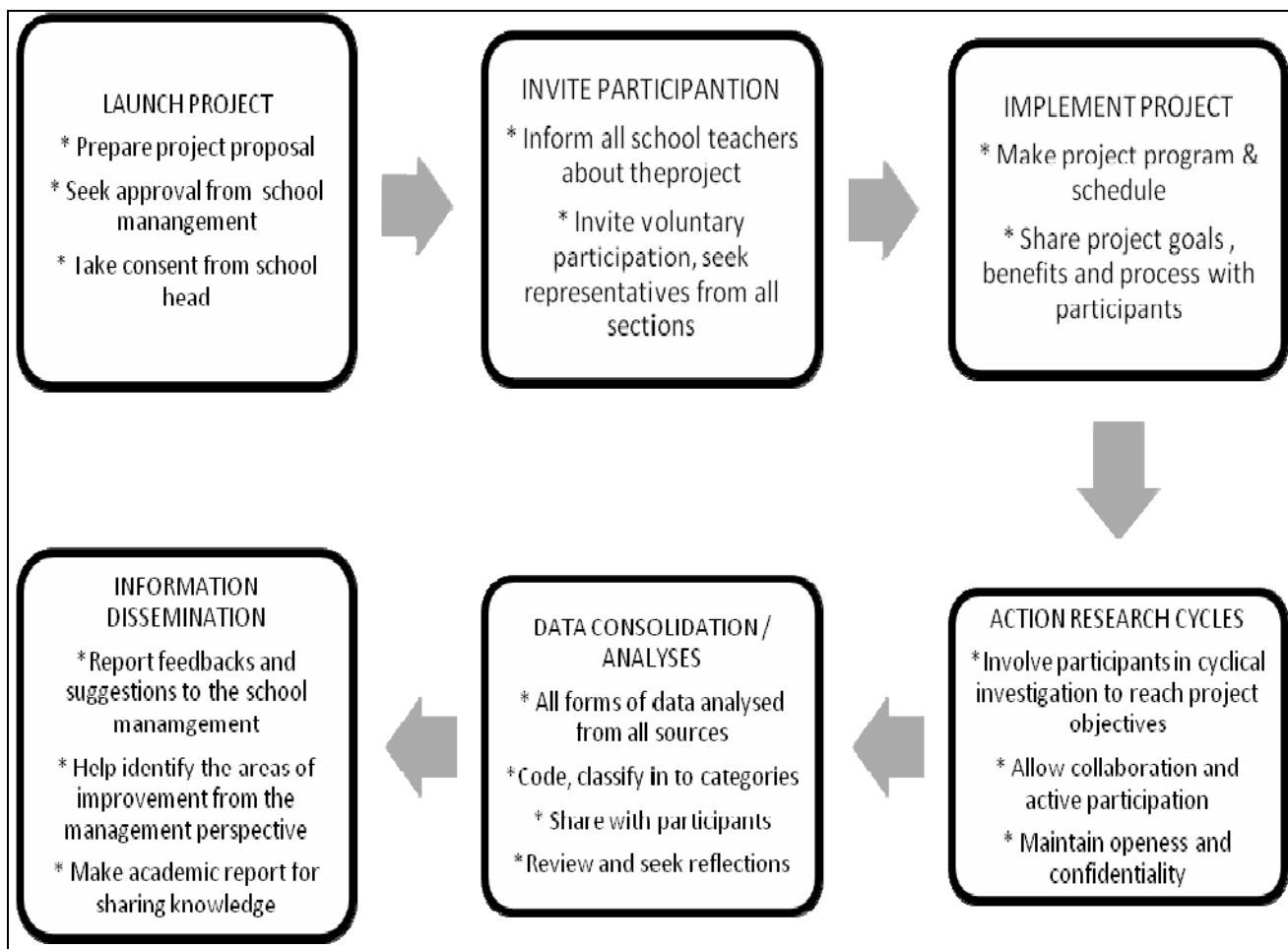
iv) Identify the coping responses one employs in the face of stress and analyze the effectiveness of these responses in dealing with the stress. (At this stage in the programme, the facilitator may intervene actively to provide knowledge about the various coping skills needed for attaining a mind-body balance).

v) Help participants identify “personal coping plans” which may include the strategies to enhance coping with work stress. These coping skills should take in to consideration the physical, emotional and cognitive well-being of the individuals.

vi) Encourage participants to practice their coping plans and through regular study and review find out the efficacy of these plans in terms of achieving the basic purpose of being “happy at work” or enhancing their job well-being.

The diagrammatic representation for the programme based on the above mentioned process for enhancing the job well-being of teachers by evolving effective coping skills may be depicted in figure 11. This process may not be the absolute or the perfect solution for enhancing coping and job well-being of the teachers in international schools but may be used

as a building block in the bigger picture of providing a nurturing environment for the teachers to flourish and work in.



**Figure 11** The Process for Enhancing Coping & Job Well-Being

## APPLICATIONS OF THE KNOWLEDGE

The knowledge that has been acquired from this research project can be valuable for both academic and applied purposes. The implications of having a teacher with high levels of job wellbeing are many. Research based evidence highlights this claim by showing that the school reforms have promoted teacher job satisfaction, improved the school and classroom climate, enhanced student support, and increased student achievement (Erb, 2000). A word of

caution must be shared that since this research was limited to a case study of this international school, the findings cannot be generalised as is the case in quantitative studies. However, the knowledge about the process accrued from this research can be useful in three dimensions: by this school's management, by the teachers, and also for research purposes.

### 1. The Participant School's Management

1.1 The participant school's management can use the information about the need to enhance job well-being of the teachers working at their school. It is important for any school to retain their human resource capital. As highlighted by Pillay et al. (2005) there is a growing concern about teacher's well being as they are experiencing increasing levels of attrition, stress and burnout. So the school management must appreciate the importance of keeping their teachers "happy" at their work place.

1.2 The school management can use the process model for gaining regular feedback from the teachers working at the school. More of the feedbacks given by the participants can be put in to practice in the school, leading to school improvement. One such suggestion is about professional sharing among the teachers in the school. According to Erb (2000) several research studies have also highlighted the importance of common planning time in implementing team reforms at schools.

### 2. International School Teachers

2.1 The participant teachers may be encouraged to share their learning and understanding with the other teachers working in the same environment.

2.2 The participant teachers can form a resource base for improving the job well-being of teachers through the organization of the group coping activities at this school.

### 3. Academic Purposes

3.1 These research findings can be used for reference in the field of teacher stress and job well-being within the specific context of international schools.

3.2 The academic knowledge about the coping behaviour of the teachers may be further enhanced through quantitative study with a large sample, and the rigors of conducting a quantitative survey.



3.3 Further investigations can be made in this field by quantitative measurement of job well being as a result of effective coping.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The process of reflecting about the current research based learning helps to envisage the directions for future research related to this.

One recommendation is that this process of reviewing stress and evolving coping skills for the teachers has to be an ongoing activity for any school. While the majority of the studies for interventions to improve coping showed positive effects, several authors mentioned the need for follow-up, long-term evaluation. One study collected data a year after the intervention and found that improvements had regressed to initial levels (Bunce & West, 1996). Another study (Golembiewski, Hilles, & Daly, 1987) showed that initial improvement faded somewhat one year after the program was completed. These results highlight the necessity of using methods that maintain intervention impact over an extended period of time. Thus, the school management could use this process information as an ongoing human resource development technique.

Another recommendation is that the basic information generated through this research should be reviewed in long term and the action research cycles be continued with the teachers to measure the impacts of the research project. Evaluative studies of intervention programs (Brown & Uehera, 1999) have a variety of outcomes for stress management and/or reduction. Both long- and short-term effects were noted, with the overall results including:

- Improved peer support
- Reduced levels of somatic complaints
- Enhanced feelings of personal accomplishment
- Decreased work pressure and role ambiguity
- Improved job satisfaction

Further suggestion for future research emerges from the need to support the results of this research with quantitative measures. One more recommendation is to include specific intervention techniques like time management, problem solving, resolving inter personal conflicts, and improving communications.

An additional area of future research investigation could be the cross cultural differences in coping styles and strategies of the teachers, since these teachers in an international school also face multi cultural adjustment (Hayden & Thompson, 2000). In a research by Berry (1990) of teachers working in a multicultural Pacific region, contact between cultures was found to be a cause of workplace stress. For teachers who move into unfamiliar cultures, acculturative stress can cause lowered mental health (e.g., confusion, anxiety, depression) and feelings of alienation; those who feel marginalized can become highly stressed (Berry, 1990). Teachers from very different cultures might neither understand nor appreciate the cultural differences of the communities in which they are placed. Since novice teachers are often reluctant to ask for help, they may be afraid to let anyone know that they are having problems in the classroom. This could then lead to additional stress, which eventually leads to high absenteeism and attrition. Those who are recruited thousands of miles away from family and friends may have inadequate social networks to provide the social support that is critical for worker health.

The last recommendation emerges from the limitation of the study which involved only a few teacher representatives from the school due to the constraints of an action research programme to be completed in a short time. The time was a constraint as the teachers have a busy schedule and their work semesters are bound by the school calendar. It is strongly recommended that all teachers maybe provided an opportunity to participate and empower themselves through the action research processes. This insight in to the action research process in itself would provide a wonderful tool to the teachers that can be used in various applications including improving student learning.

## **CONCLUSION**

The current study has endowed the vision for creating awareness about the importance of “being happy at work” not only to the participants in the school but also to the school’s management.

This research evolved an understanding about strategically developing effective coping practices that help in promoting the job well-being of the international school-teachers. As reviewed in qualitative terms, the action research based project attained the objectives designed for the study. The aim of sharing this information about the importance and need of

teacher well-being was also targeted to impact the school's awakening process which would lead to school improvement.

As shared earlier, the linking of the terms 'action' and 'research' highlight the essential feature of the methodology used in this research. This method according to Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1982) implies trying out ideas in practice as means of improvement and as a means of increasing knowledge. By sharing the account of this action based research in one school, the attempt is to add knowledge to successful practice among other schools in the same international educational context of Bangkok, Thailand, which are governed by the same environment through the Thai Ministry of Education.

Concluding with a reflection about the process of action research one can agree with Zuber- Skerritt (2000) that "it is a process which is not absolute or static". This research initiated a dynamic process of improving the job well-being at this school. It has indeed kindled awareness in the teachers, who participated, and the school's head and management. This awareness has been fruitful in leading some changes in the school which the teachers recommended in the research process. Thus, the action research process for this school is also not absolute as its influence may still be going on through implementation of other suggestions. The recommendations of this study are also not static, as the school management can continue this process to support the personal development of the teachers, as they did through this project, and gain fresh feedbacks and suggestions to the school improvement process.

To comprehend the advantage of such an action research based study in an educational background, Noolan Jr. and Hoover (2004) have mentioned:

*"When teachers are engaged in carrying out action research projects and are given the opportunity to share their work with their colleagues, the level of professional conversation in the school changes dramatically and the school culture follows".*

As the significant intention of this research was to contribute to the an actual work setting and, to make a meaningful as well as original contribution to the field of applied behavioural science research, one can reflect that to some measure if not complete this study has been able to stimulate the desired awareness. A new thought process has been ignited at

this international school. It is an immense satisfaction, both academically and professionally, that the information generated through this research has benefited the participants and also the school management. This research is not just a culmination of efforts as envisaged at the beginning of this dissertation, but an ongoing process about trying to meaningfully apply the knowledge that is accrued through research.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arnold, T. H. (1993). Strengthening student teachers reflective /critical thinking skill through collaborative research. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 20: 97-105.
- Bangkok Post (2007). *International and Bilingual schools in Thailand*. A special publication of the Bangkok Post.
- Barth, A.R. (1992). Burnout among teachers. [Burnout bei Lehrern].Göttingen: Hogrefe.
- Berry, J. W. (1990). Psychology of acculturation: Understanding individuals moving between cultures. In R. W. Brislin (Ed.), *Applied Cross-Cultural Psychology*. (pp. 232-253). Newbury Park, Ca.: Sage.
- Blalock, M. B.; & Blalock, A.P. (2002). *Managerial well-being triumph over job-related stress*. Retrieved from <http://www.stress.org>
- Bradfield, R.; & Fones, D. (1984). Recipe for Burnout: the Special Education Teachers' Diet. *Academic Therapy*, 19: 499-504. (EJ 298 251).
- Branigan, E. (2002). "But how can you prove it?" Issues of Rigour in Action Research. *Stronger Families learning Exchange Bulletin*, 2, Spring / Summer 2002 (12-13).
- Brown, Z.A.; & Uehara, D.L. (1999). *Coping with Teacher Stress: A Research Synthesis for Pacific Educators*. Retrieved from <http://www.prel.org/products/products/coping-teacherstress.htm>
- Bryman, A. (2006). *Triangulation in social sciences*. Retrieved July 16, 2006, from [www.referenceworld.com/sage/socialscience/triangulation.pdf](http://www.referenceworld.com/sage/socialscience/triangulation.pdf)
- Buunk, B.P.; et.al. (1998). Psychosocial aspects of occupational stress. In P.J.D. Drenth, H. Thierry, and C.J. de Wolff, (Eds.), *Handbook of Work and Organizational Psychology*. (V. 12). Psychology press.
- Caplan, R.D.; & Jones, K.W. (1975). Effects of workload, role ambiguity, and Type A personality on anxiety, depression and heart rate. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 60: 713-719.
- Carr, W.; & Kemmis, S. (1986) *Becoming Critical. Education, knowledge and action research*, Lewes: Falmer.

- Carver, C.S.; Scheier, M.F.; & Weintraub, J.K. (1989). Assessing coping strategies: A theoretically based approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56: 267-283.
- Casanova, V. (1989). Research and practice: We can integrate them. *NEA Today*, 7(6):44-49
- Cherniss, C. (1980). *Professional Burnout in Human Service Organizations*. New York: Praeger.
- Cohen, F. (1984). "Coping". In J.D. Matarazzo, S.M. Weiss, J.A. Herd, N.E. Miller & S.M. Weiss (Eds.), *Behavioral Health: A Handbook of Health Enhancement and Disease Prevention*. New York: Wiley.
- Cooper, C.L.; Cooper, R.D.; & Eaker, L.H. (1986). *Living with stress*. Penguin Books.
- Cunningham, W.G. (1982). Teacher burnout: stylish fad or profound problem. *Planning and Changing*. 12: 219-244.
- Daniels, K.; & Guppy, A. (1994). Occupational stress, social support, job control, and psychological well-being. *Human Relations*. 47(12): 1523-1544.
- Darling-Hammond, L.; & McLaughlin, M. (1995). Policies that support professional development in an era of reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(8): 587-604.
- Davies, D.; & Dodd, J. (2002). Qualitative research and the question of rigor. *Qualitative Health Research*, 12(2): 279-289.
- Dick, B. (1997a). *Approaching an action research thesis: an overview*. [On line]. Retrieved from <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/phd.html>
- ..... (1999b). 'Sources of rigour in action research: Addressing the issues of trustworthiness and credibility', Paper presented at the Association for Qualitative Research Conference, Melbourne, 6-10 July.
- ..... (2000c). *Postgraduate programs using action research* [On line]. Retrieved from <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/ppar.html>
- Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin*. 95: 542-575.
- Diener, E.; Emmons, R. A.; Larsen, R. J.; & Griffin, S. (1985). The Satisfaction with Life Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49: 71-75
- Diener, E.; Gohm, C.; Suh, E.; & Oishi, S. (1998). Do the effects of marital status on subjective well-being vary across cultures? In R. A. Baron and M.J. Kalsher (Eds.), *Psychology*. (5th edition). Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2001.

- Dunham, J. (1994). A Framework of Teachers' Coping Strategies for a Whole School Stress Management Policy. *Educational Management Administration Leadership*, 22(3): 168. Downloaded from <http://ema.sagepub.com> by SJO Demo on September 6, 2007.
- Elliott, J. (1991). *Action Research for Educational Change*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Erb, T.O. (2000). Do middle school reforms really make a difference? *The Clearing House*, 73(4): 194-200.
- Feiman-Nemser, S.; & Floden, R. E. (1986). The cultures of teaching. In M.C. Wittrock (ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). (pp. 505-26). New York: Macmillan.
- Folkman, S.; & Lazarus, R. S. (1980a). An analysis of coping in a middle-aged community sample. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 21: 219-239
- ..... (1988b). Manual for the ways of coping questionnaire. Palo Alto, Ca. : Consulting Psychologists Press.
- Forman, S. (1981). Stress-management training: Evaluation of effects on school psychological services. *The Journal of School Psychology*, 19(3): 233-241.
- Fredrickson (2005). "International Education in Thailand". A Bangkok Post supplement.
- Friesen, D. W. (1994). The action research game: Recreating pedagogical relationships in the teaching internship. *Educational Action Research*, 2(2): 243-258.
- Fueyo, V.; & Neves, A. (1995). Preservice teacher as researcher: A research context for change in the heterogeneous classroom. *Action in Teacher Education*, 16: 39-49.
- Golembiewski, R. T.; Hilles, R.; & Daly, R. (1987). Some effects of multiple OD interventions on burnout and worksite features. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 23(3): 295-313.
- Greenlees, D. (2006). *International schools grapple with 'staggering' demand*. International Herald Tribune. Published: Friday, September 29, 2006. Retrieved from <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2006/09/29/news/ateach.php>
- Greer, H. G.; & Greer, B. B. (1992). Stopping Burnout Before it Starts: Prevention Measures at the Pre-service Level. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 15(3): 168-174.
- Grundy, S. (1988). Three Modes of Action Research. In S. Kemmis, & R. McTaggart (Eds.), *The Action Research Reader*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Geelong: Deakin University Press.
- Gulwadi, G.B. (2005). Seeking restorative experiences: elementary school teachers' choices for places that enable coping with stress. *Environment and Behavior*, 38(4): 503-520

- Harvard Health Publications (2005). "A psychology of satisfaction". Harvard Health Publications. Retrieved February 28, 2008 from <http://health.msn.com/health-topics/depression/articlepage>.
- Hayden, M.; & Thompson, J. (2000). *International schools and international education: improving teaching, management & quality*. Kogan Page.
- Hoyos, T.H.; & Kallus, K.W., (2005). Burnout Risk Factors: Stress-Recovery-State and Coping among Teachers. Retrieved from <http://www.psychserver.uni-graz.at/aou / Artikel.pdf>
- Holter, I.M.; and Schwartz - Barcott, D. (1993). Action Research: What is it? How has it been used and how can it be used in nursing? *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 128: 298-304.
- Huff, J.W. (2000). *Application of attitude strength to job satisfaction: The moderating role of attitude strength in the prediction of organizational outcomes from job satisfaction*. Ph.D. thesis. Northern Illinois University. Source: DAI-B 61/12.
- James, C.; & Connolly, U. (2000). *Effective Change in Schools*. Routledge - Falmer, London and New York.
- Jarvis, M. (2002). *Stress News 2002*. Vol. No.4.
- Judge, T.A.; Locke, E.A.; & Durham, C.C. (1997). The dispositional causes of job satisfaction: A core evaluations approach. *Research In Organizational Behaviour*. 19:151-188.
- Judge, T.A.; & Bono, J.E. (2002). A Rose by Any Other Name: Are Self-Esteem, Generalized Self-Efficacy, Neuroticism, and Locus of Control Indicators of a Common Construct? In "Personality Psychology in the Workplace", (ed.) Roberts, B.W. & Hogan, R. APA, Washington D.C.
- Keating, J.; Diaz-Greenberg, R.; Baldwin, M.; & Thousand, J. (1998). A collaborative action research model for teacher preparation programs. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 49(5): 381-390.
- Kemmis, S.; & McTaggart, R. (1982a). *The action research planner*. (2ed.) Deakin University Press, Australia.
- ..... (1990b). *The action research reader*. Deakin University Victoria.
- Kyriacou, C. (2001). Teacher stress: directions for future research. *Educational Review*, 53(1): 28-35. EJ 622 519
- Lazarus, R.; & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York: Springer.
- Lewin, K. (1946). Action research and minority problems. *Journal of Social Issues*, 2(4): 34-46.



- Lieberman, A.; & Miller, L. (1994). Problems and possibilities of institutionalizing teacher research. In S. Hollingsworth & H. Sockett (Eds.), *Teacher research and educational reforms: The ninety third book of the National Society for the state education*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S.; & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Little, J.W. (1982). Norms of collegiality and experimentation: Workplace, conditions of school success. *American Educational Research Journal*, 19: 325-340.
- Long, B. (1988). Stress Management for School Personnel: Stress-inoculation Training and Exercise. *Psychology in the Schools*, 25 : 314-324. (EJ 379 691). No need these number
- Maxwell, J. A. (1992). Understanding and validity in qualitative research. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62(3): 279-300.
- McCutcheon, G. (1987). Teachers' experience doing action research. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 64(2): 116-127.
- McCutchen, G.; & Jung, B. (1990). Alternative Perspectives on Action Research. *Theory into Practice*, 29(3).
- McKernan, J. (1991). *Curriculum Action Research. A Handbook of Methods and Resources for the Reflective Practitioner*. London: Kogan Page.
- McNiff, J. (2002). *Action research for professional development*. Available online at <http://www.jeanmcniff.com/booklet1.html>. and the same format should be used.
- McNiff, J., Lomax, P. & Whitehead, J., (1996). *You and Your Action Research Project*. Routledge: London.
- Mertler, C.A. (2006). *Action Research: Teachers as Researchers in the Classroom*. SAGE.
- Miles, M.B.; & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis* 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Mills, G. (2003). *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education,
- Milstein, M.; & Golaszewski, T. J. (1985). Effects of organizationally based and individually based stress management efforts in elementary school settings. *Urban Education*, 19(4): 389-409.

- Mohan, K.P. (2004). *Work Specific Locus of Control as a moderator of the relationship between Organizational Stressors and Job Related Well Being*. Project thesis, Doctor of Philosophy Degree (Applied Behavioral Science Research). Bangkok.
- Mohan, K.P. (2007). *The Role of Person and Perceived Situation Variables leading to Job Well-Being of International School Teachers*. Project thesis, Doctor of Philosophy Degree (Applied Behavioral Science Research). Bangkok.
- Nes, L.S.; & Segerstrom, S.C. (2006). Dispositional Optimism and Coping: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10 (3): 235-251
- Neves de Jesus, S.; & Conboy, J. (2001). A stress management course to prevent teacher distress. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 15 (3): 131-137. Article URL: <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/10.1108/09513540110384484>
- Noolan Jr., J.; & Hoover, L.A. (2004). *Teacher supervision and evaluation: Theory into practice*. Wiley, Jossey-Bass Education.
- O'Brien, R. (1998). An Overview of the Methodological Approach of Action Research. Retrieved August 29, 2007, from <http://www.web.ca/~robrien/papers/arfinal.html>
- Parasaruman, S.; & Alutto, J.A. (1984). Sources and Outcomes of Stress in Organizational Settings: Toward the Development of a Structural Model. *Academy of Management Journal*. 27 (2): 330-350.
- Pillay, H.; Goddard, R.; & Wilss, L. (2005). Well-being, burnout and competence: Implications for teachers. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 30(2): 22-33.
- Pines, A.; & Aronson, E. (1988). *Career Burnout: Causes and Cures*. New York: Free Press.
- Pope, C.; Ziebland, S.; & Mays, N. (2000). Qualitative research in health care: Analysing qualitative data. *BMJ* 2000, 320:114-116.
- Riggio, R.E. (1996). *Introduction to Industrial / Organizational Psychology*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York : Harper Collins College.
- Rosaen, C.; & Schram, P. (1997). Professional development for beginning teachers through practical inquiry. *Educational Action Research*, 5(2): 255-281.
- Russell, D.W.; Altmaier, E.; & Velzen, D.W. (1987). Job-related stress, social support and burnout among class room teachers. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 72 (2): 269-274.

- Schnorr, D.; & Painter, D. (1999). *Partnering the university field experience research model with action research*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. Washington, D.C.
- Shore, I. (1992). *Empowering education*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago.
- Silverman, D. (2004). *Qualitative Research: theory, method and practice*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Sage: New York.
- Steffes, B.; & Valentine, J. (1996). The relationship between organizational characteristics and expected benefits in interdisciplinary teams. *Research in Middle Level Education Quarterly*, 19(4): 83-102.
- Stoer, S.R.; & Cortesa, L.O. (2001). Action-research and the Production of Knowledge in a Teacher Education based on Inter/Multicultural Education. *Intercultural Education*, <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713393965~db=all~tab=issueslist~branches=12 - v1212> (1): 65–78.
- Strauser, R.D.; Ketz, K.; & Keim, J. (2002). The relationship between self-efficacy, locus of control and work personality - Self-Efficacy and Locus of Control. *Journal of Rehabilitation*. (Jan-Mar 2002).
- Stringer, E.T. (1999). *Action Research*. (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Sage: U.S. A.
- Stringer, E.T. (2004). *Action Research in Education*. Pearson education, New Jersey.
- Suls, J.; & Fletcher, B. (1985). The relative efficacy of avoidant and nonavoidant coping strategies: A meta-analysis. *Health Psychology*, 4: 249-288.
- Thompson, J.J. (1998). Towards a model of international education. In M.C.Hayden & J.J.Thompson (eds.), *International Education: principles and practice*. Kogan Page: London.
- Terry, D.J.; Neilsen, M.; & Perchard, L. (1993). Effects of work stress on psychological well-being and job satisfaction: The stress-buffering role of social support. *Australian Journal of Psychology*. 45 (3):168-175.
- Tudor, T.R. (1997). The effects of self-efficacy, work locus of control, and job involvement on perceived work stressors and strains. PhD thesis. Virginia Commonwealth University. Source: DAI-A 58/06.
- Walker, G.R. (2000). One-way streets of our culture. *International Schools Journal*. XIX (2): 11-19.

- Warr, P.B. (1999). *Well-being and the workplace*. In Daniel Kahneman, Ed Diener and Norbert Schwarz (ed), *Well-Being: The foundations of Hedonic Psychology*. New York: Russel Sage.
- Weiner, S. (2008). *The How of Happiness*. Retrieved February 18, 2008, from <http://lifestyle.msn.com/mindbodyandsoul/personalgrowth/articlegh.aspx?cp-documentid=5945810>
- Whitehead, J. (1989). 'Creating a living educational theory from questions of the kind, "How do I Improve my Practice?"', *Cambridge Journal of Education* 19(1): 41–52.
- Whitehead, J. (1993). *The Growth of Educational Knowledge*. Bournemouth; Hyde. Retrieved March 1, 2007 from <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/writings/jwgek93.htm>
- Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2000). A generic model for action learning and action research programs within organisations. *ALAR Journal* 5 (1): 41–50.
-

## **APPENDIX**

## List of Appendix

- A. Letter to the School Management & Letter to teachers
- B. Teacher Feedback (Form 1)
- C. Teachers Feedback (Form 2)
- D. Teachers Feedback (Form 3)
- E. Reflection Journal (Form 1)
- F. Reflection Journal (Form 2)
- G. Reflection Journal (Form 3)
- H. Reflection Journal (Form 4)
- I. Section Wise Findings from Participants
- J. SWLS scale
- K. Handout- "The How of Happiness"
- L. Handout- "A Psychology of Satisfaction"

**APPENDIX A (1): LETTER TO SCHOOL HEAD/MANAGEMENT**

2 December 2007

To  
School Head  
Bangkok.

Dear Sir,

I have had the privilege to work at this school since 2004. As you are aware, along with working here I am also enrolled for PhD at Behavioral Science Research Institute, Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok.

As part of my PhD research programme, I am undertaking an action research into how I can encourage the teachers working at our school to cope effectively with work demands and in the process enhance their feelings of job well-being.

As a student of applied behavioral science, this research has been designed with the intention to contribute to improving the work environment where I have gained so much over the last 3 years.

I would be grateful if you would grant me permission to conduct this research. The research project involves teachers' participating actively to evolve strategies to enhance their coping skills. Around 15 participants shall be asked to join this research on voluntary basis. I will seek permission from the teachers themselves to become involved in the research. I guarantee confidentiality around any information collected, and promise not to reveal the names of the school, or colleagues in the research report.

My research report will be available to you for the purpose of sharing and examination before it is published. I enclose two copies of this letter, one for your files and one to be returned to me for retention in my files. I would appreciate it, therefore, if you would sign the permission slip below and return it to me at your earliest convenience.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

Kanu Priya Mohan

**APPENDIX A (2) : LETTER TO TEACHERS**

Dear Teacher,

I am doing a project that I hope will encourage teachers working at our school to participate and evolve some strategies to cope effectively with work demands.

As you are aware this project needs active collaboration and I would like to seek your help in carrying it out.

I will be making notes of our interactions, group discussions, a reflective diary and some feedback questionnaires as part of the project. I promise not to reveal your name, or the name of the school in writing my report of the project.

If you would like to take part in the project, please sign the permission slip below.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

Kanu Priya Mohan.

(Researcher)



**APPENDIX B: TEACHERS FEEDBACK FORM-1**

1. How long have you been teaching in this school? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What section of school are you teaching? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What are the subjects taught? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What classes do you handle? \_\_\_\_\_
5. In a regular school week, how many hours do you teach? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Your age: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Nationality: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Marital status: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Have you felt the work at school is stressful? Then what are the main causes?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. Do you feel that you can cope with the work related stress? If yes, what do you do to cope with the stress related to school.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. Do you feel you can control your reactions to stress at work?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX C: TEACHERS FEEDBACK FORM-2**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Group: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Can you recommend any special **coping technique** for dealing with work related stress:

A. On an individual level (based on your experience)

---

---

---

B. On a group level (for all teachers in the school)

---

---

---

2. Would you like to recommend any special resources for dealing with work related stress (like calling some experts, doing meditation training, etc.)?

---

---

---

3. Can you identify at least one experience of successful coping with work stress and share it with the others in your group during the next meeting?

---

---

4. Would you recommend the use of this to your colleagues?

---

---

*Please bring form on the next meeting*

---

### APPENDIX D: TEACHERS FEEDBACK FORM-3

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Group:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Did you identify a Personal Action Plan to achieve the basic goal of happiness at the work place?

---



---

2. Please tick the areas in the chart which indicate the implantation of the Personal plan:

Frequency of putting in to action	Relaxation or meditation or any relaxing activity	Physical activity or Exercise	Eating balanced Food/ proper diet	Sleep well/ taking proper rest	Any other

3. Do you feel that you can continue to take the changing of your stress reactions as your own responsibility?

---



---

4. Did you feel you can change the way you react to the work stress at school?

---



---

## APPENDIX E: Reflection Journal (Form 1)

### REFLECTION JOURNAL

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Did you experience any high level of stress at the school today? Can you identify the source/sources?

---



---

2. What did you do to cope with the work stress?

---



---

3. Did you feel any different afterwards?

---



---

4. Any feedbacks or special observations about the experience.

---

### REFLECTION JOURNAL

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Did you experience any high level of stress at the school today? Can you identify the source/sources?

---



---

2. What did you do to cope with the work stress?

---



---

3. Did you feel any different afterwards?

---



---

4. Any feedbacks or special observations about the experience.

---



---

## APPENDIX F: Reflection Journal (Form 2)

**Submission Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Group:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Please tick the chart at the end of each day to record what did you for **your self** by devoting time for yourself , which may be related to the following areas:

Date	Relaxation or meditation or any relaxing activity	Physical activity or Exercise	Eating balanced Food/ proper diet	Sleep well/ taking proper rest	Any special activity

*If you would like, you mention what you did, e.g. walking, dancing etc.*

2. What are your feelings about joining this project at school?

---



---

3. Did you feel you can change the way you react to the work stress at school?

---



---

4. Can you identify some areas of school improvement that we may discuss when we meet next? It may include improvement for individuals and also for the whole school.

---



---

5. An exercise in gratitude: This is to be implemented by you – for yourself at home. At the end of each day, can you mentally recall 5 things that you are grateful for that happened during the day.

### APPENDIX G: Reflection Journal (Form 3)

1. Please fill the chart after thinking carefully that did you spend some time for your self today by devoting some time to the following areas:

Date	On mental relaxation or doing something to relax yourself	Engaging in Physical activity or Exercise	Eating balanced Food	Sleep well/ taking proper rest

*If you would like, you mention what you did, e.g. walking, dancing etc.*

5. Did you feel any different after joining in this project at school?

---



---

6. Any feedbacks or special observations about the experience.

---



---



---

**Submission Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Group:** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX H: Reflection Journal (Form 4)

### Some thoughts to share:

- Your happiness is your own responsibility
- Happiness is:
  - A state of our own mind
  - It can be achieved through training our mind
  - It is the ultimate “purpose” of our lives.

### The Serenity Prayer-

“God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change;  
courage to change the things I can;  
and wisdom to know the difference.”

–Reinhold Niebuhr

### An activity for your self-

- Can you identify a Personal Action Plan to achieve the basic goal of happiness at the work place?
- Your Personal Action Plan may include the strategies you have been using so far to deal with work stress or include some new
- The plan’s success depends on how you think about it and what are the results

#### Personal Action Plan

Strategy identified	Act (time frame)	Observe your feelings	Reflect & Review

**Please continue to nurture your Happiness at work!**



**APPENDIX I**

**SECTION WISE FINDINGS FROM THE PARTICIPANTS**



### I.1: Sources of work stress identified by the groups

Related to	KGS	ELS	SRS
<b>Work</b>	1. Work over load- pressure of time to complete activities	Unscheduled activities during the year	
	2. Academics/ curriculum / books not appropriate for each level	Lack of common curriculum planning from KGS to SRS	
<b>Students</b>	New admissions in between school term	Student's behavior	1. Student's behaviour
		Lack of student interest	2. Lack of proper foundation for some students
			3. Language problem in students
			4. Wide disparity in learning abilities
<b>Resource limitation</b>		Lack of teaching resources	Lack of proper infrastructure
		No proper lab for Science	Physical appearance of the class rooms
<b>Management support</b>		Lack of appreciation for work	
		Unequal work distribution	
<b>School policy</b>		No exams for classes 1-2	Improper planning for the school calendar
			Improper planning of the curriculum
<b>Interpersonal Relationships</b>	Communication problem with colleagues	Being misunderstood by colleagues	Communication problem (from management to staff, office to teachers)

**Table I.2: Ascertaining the Negative Impacts of Work Stress**

<b>Impact of Stress on</b>	<b>KGS</b>	<b>ELS</b>	<b>SRS</b>
<b>Self</b>	Irritability	Irritability	High BP
	Mood swings	Head aches	Anxiety
	Back aches		Headaches
	Burst of anger		Problems in back, neck & eyes
	Lack of energy		
	Cannot sleep	Sleeping problems	
	<b>Students</b>	Not able to help students	Unable to motivate students
Speak harshly		Felt like doing nothing at all	Annoyed with their questions
Less patient			Angry with them
<b>Family</b>	Lose temper, Less patient	Don't feel like doing household chores-cooking	The stress does carry home....sometimes get angry with their kids.
	Self withdrawal	Don't feel like teaching own kids	
	Do not want to communicate with others		
<b>Others (friends)</b>	No conversation	Feel like running away	Don't feel like talking to others
	Don't feel like interacting with others	Problems in concentrating while driving, giving tuitions	With draw

**Table I.3: Coping strategies used by teachers**

<b>Coping strategy</b>	<b>KGS</b>	<b>ELS</b>	<b>SRS</b>
<i>Individual</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Listen to light music</li> <li>-Window shopping</li> <li>-Sleep it off</li> <li>-Meditate</li> <li>-Think to find solution to the problem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Think positive</li> <li>-Relax at home</li> <li>-Watch television</li> <li>-Listen to music</li> <li>-Spend time praying</li> <li>-Dance</li> <li>Physical exercise- walking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Burst out in anger &amp; then retreat in to silence</li> <li>-Music and dance</li> <li>-Look for change in the daily routine</li> </ul>
<i>Interpersonal</i>	Depend on support of friends and co workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Try to think about strategies for class control.</li> <li>-Preparation for the classes in advance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Talk to friends</li> </ul>

**Table I.4: Recommendations for Individual level coping strategies**

<b>KGS</b>	<b>ELS</b>	<b>SRS</b>
	Give yourself a smile at the beginning of each day	Develop an area of personal interest
Talking to friends	Talk to friends	
Relaxation	Relaxation	
Meditation	Meditation	Self reflection
Aerobics/ Exercise	Aerobics/ Exercise	Dancing
	Go for long walks	
Listening to music	Listening to music	Listening to music
	Manage your time well	
Eat a healthy diet, not too much spicy, or fried.	Eat in moderation	Avoid fried food, too much sugar

**Table I.5: Recommendations for Group/ organizational coping strategies**

<b>KGS</b>	<b>ELS</b>	<b>SRS</b>
Dancing	Group activity- Dancing, singing	Activities – dancing, dramatics
Art and craft	Fixed school policies	Clubs- contemporary dance clubs
Painting / doing creative activities	Outings for teachers	Organize workshops – academics, art, others
Once a term outing for teachers		Team efforts in academics – e.g. subject teachers to meet at least once month
Arrange seminars for personal and professional development	Allocation of duties fairly	Social exchange among teachers – have coffee/ tea meeting after school
Share reading materials	Fixed school calendar	Curriculum planning- as a team
	Teachers' In service day (for implementing some work shops or having fun activities)	Plan activities for the students – to share teachers talents

**Table I.6: Areas of School Improvement Identified**

<b>KGS</b>	<b>ELS</b>	<b>SRS</b>
PLANNING	PLANNING	PLANNING
Review the current curriculum and modify- e.g. the books are not related	Fixed school calendar – involve teachers in planning	Curriculum planning- as a team
Improve resources for teachers and activities for students in KGS	Improve resources and maintenance of existing infrastructure	Plan activities for the students – share teachers' talents
	Repairs of existing infrastructure	
	Allocation of work before school holidays	
SCHOOL POLICIES	SCHOOL POLICIES	SCHOOL POLICIES
Arrange frequent outings and activities (gardening, shopping) for KGS	Fair and fixed policies for teachers recruitment, and increments	Involvement of all teachers in planning and implementing
Provide admin support for KGS activities- e.g. making of report cards and printing work sheets	Allocation of work for teachers – fair allocation, giving opportunities to all teachers	
Review the time table of teachers so that they may gain time to access internet and do planning at school	Rules and policies for student discipline	
	Policies for class room management	
	Substitute/ floating teachers	

<b>KGS</b>	<b>ELS</b>	<b>SRS</b>
<b>PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>
Arrange seminars for professional development, new developments in teaching	Teachers' In service day (for implementing some workshops, seminars or having fun activities)	Team efforts in academics – e.g. subject teachers to meet at least once month
		Interaction with other schools
		Each teacher to have a class presentation- any format
<b>PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>
Arrange seminars for personal development	Arrange seminars for personal development	Arrange seminars for personal development
Share some reading materials		Informal sharing amongst teachers
<b>SOCIAL SUPPORT ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>SOCIAL SUPPORT ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>SOCIAL SUPPORT ACTIVITIES</b>
Once a term outing for teachers	Plan a calendar of activities for social meets, activities for the teachers for the next year	Social exchange among teachers – have coffee/tea meeting after school
Activities- dancing, singing, aerobics		Informal exchanges for teachers- cross cultural sharing among them

**APPENDIX J**

**SWLS Scale**

## Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)

Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

- 7 - Strongly agree
- 6 - Agree
- 5 - Slightly agree
- 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 - Slightly disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 1 - Strongly disagree

\_\_\_\_ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.

\_\_\_\_ The conditions of my life are excellent.

\_\_\_\_ I am satisfied with my life.

\_\_\_\_ So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.

\_\_\_\_ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Total Score on SWLS= \_\_\_\_\_



## **APPENDIX K**

**Handout: “The How of Happiness”**

**APPENDIX L**

**Handout: “A Psychology of Satisfaction”**

**VITAE**

## VITAE

**Name:** Kanu Priya Mohan

**Date of Birth:** 10 December, 1968

**Place of Birth:** Chandigarh, India.

**Address:** 18 A, Phatssana Garden, 19, Ekamai 6, Sukumvit Soi 63,  
Bangkok, Thailand.

### **Educational Background:**

1985 I.C.S.E. (Class 10)

1989 Bachelors of Arts (Psychology Honours and Maths)

1991 Masters in Business Administration (M.B.A. Marketing)

2008 Ph.D. in Applied Behavioural Science Research