

Handbook

**For Chairs of the SALT School
Visit**



SALT

**School Accountability for Learning and
Teaching**

Rhode Island Department of Education

and

Catalpa Ltd.TM

2nd edition revised

September 2006

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The Catalpa Ltd web site, which has additional information about Practice-Based Inquiry[®], the SALT school visit and other professional visits is www.catalpa.org

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PREFACE

THE CHALLENGES FACING A SALT VISIT CHAIR

*But I was going to say when Truth broke in
With all her matter-of-fact ...*

--Robert Frost

The visit is not a study of how a variable impacts a school, nor is it one step in a planning process that is supposed to make sure the school does the right thing. The visit is an inquiry about how well schools are performing. It is a pursuit of truth.

A visit chair does not say, "Whatever." A chair does say, "What is your evidence?"

A visit chair does not say, "Are you comfortable with that?" A chair does say, "Are you certain about that?"

A visit chair does not say, "Everyone's opinion is as good as everyone else's." A chair does say, "What do we agree about as a team?"

A visit chair does not say, "What does RIDE or the curriculum guide say it should be?" A chair does say, "What is it, and what do you think about it?"

It is important that you, as SALT chair, have the know-how to conduct a good SALT visit. It is important that you are savvy about how schools and the SALT visit work.

The SALT school visit is a real, human event. A group of visitors, mostly teachers and administrators from districts other than the school, visit a school for five days while it is in session. The team

members have never worked together before as a group. They often are complete strangers to one another. In the beginning they are bound together only by their common experience as teachers or by their deep interest in schools.

The school is a complex place of continuous and frequently unpredictable interactions devoted to the complex tasks of teaching and student learning. Team members often find themselves in spaces that the school considers private. It is quite extraordinary that in five days a peer team can report in 20 pages its conclusions about how well it thinks the school is performing and that it can make these conclusions public. It is even more extraordinary that these conclusions are exceptionally accurate, fair, constructive and well written.

It is your challenge as SALT visit chair to lead the team so that it does this extraordinary work and does it well. Clarity and good humor make that possible. Teaching a team how the visit works as a methodology for knowing a school is the most important contribution you can make to the quality of the team's report. As the guardian of the methodology, the chair makes certain that the team's findings are accurate, legitimate and clear. The chair facilitates each team to use the methodology effectively to learn about a specific school.

More specifically, the chair is challenged to lead the team in making thousands of decisions based upon what the team members experience, see, discuss, agree upon and write. The chair continuously applies the abstract principles of the visit methodology for knowing a school to the real life of a particular team in a particular school. The chair effectively insists that the team proceed with thoughtful rigor. The chair's skill and knowledge about how to locate specific evidence in the school will make a tremendous difference in the team's work. The chair's goal is to help each team member and the team, as a whole, become adroit at using the ideas and procedures of the visit methodology as a tool for understanding the school. This is what ensures that the visit will be an inquiry, not merely a routine process that requires the team to complete a number of set steps.

This *Handbook* will help you build the complex, practical knowledge that is the base of your know-how. It provides the principles and guidelines for using the SALT visit as a methodology for knowing schools. If these are followed, the SALT visit will be a valid inquiry that builds constructive and accurate knowledge about the quality of actual school practice. These

guidelines will ensure that the process and findings of the SALT visit are consistent with the principles of SALT and that the visit fits within the other SALT components, as well as contributes to them. This *Handbook* presents the ideas, procedures and guidance from experienced chairs. This conceptual framework of the practice of conducting a visit becomes real in the crucible of each visit.

Many handbooks provide a set of steps that must be completed in an orderly and efficient fashion. While it is possible to present pieces of the visit in this manner, this *Handbook* faces the greater challenge of helping the chair make the many critical real-time decisions that will guide the team through each unique and specific application of the visit method to each particular school and team.

SALT Fellows: Michael Barnes, Carol Belair, Margaret Della Bitta, Ruth Haynsworth, Joann LaBranche, Sandy Olsen, Donna Reinalda and Pat Ribeiro have made invaluable contributions to the form and substance of this *Handbook*. They contributed to the strength of the protocol by the wisdom of their guidance based on their practice as certified chairs. They contributed directly to the writing and organization of both editions.

RIDE staff members Rick Richards and Susan Rotblat-Walker also have made critical contributions to the *Handbook*. Leslie Oh of Catalpa Ltd. edited the text and contributed to the production design.

The working partnership between RIDE staff, the SALT fellows and Catalpa has been extraordinary. The overall leadership of Peter McWalters and Rick Richards has made it happen.

Thomas A. Wilson,
Principal Partner
Catalpa Ltd.
February 11, 2005

INTRODUCTION

ORIGINS OF *HANDBOOK* (FROM 1ST EDITION)

This *Handbook* is based on work over an 8-year period with the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), public school practitioners from throughout the state and Catalpa Inc. to develop and pilot the SALT school visit. Initial work included writing the *SALT Blueprint* (1996) and the Catalpa Ltd. study of English school inspection (1992).

In January 1997, Thomas A. Wilson, Principal Partner of Catalpa Ltd., began work with the RIDE Middle Schools Design Team, which included RIDE staff and public school practitioners, to build a protocol for the SALT visit, which resulted in the first edition of the *SALT Visit Handbook*. In April 1997, the Design Team carried out the first prototype visit at Ponaganset Middle School, chaired by Mary Kay Schnare. This team then refined the protocol based on that first visit.

During the 1997-98 school year, the Middle School SALT Network conducted three additional pilot visits in Rhode Island middle schools. This contributed to revisions of the protocol that appeared in the 2nd Edition of the *Handbook*, issued in March 1998.

RIDE then developed the SALT Fellow positions to provide the key leadership for conducting the SALT visits. During the 1998-99 school year, at the request of RIDE, Carol Belair and Patricia Ribeiro, both practicing elementary school teachers in the state, took leaves from their classrooms, with the consent of their districts, to become the first SALT Fellows. The Department also asked RIDE staff member Susan Rotblat-Walker, who played a key role in the early planning of the SALT visit, to coordinate the SALT visits as a major part of her RIDE responsibilities. Tom Wilson was charged with strengthening the visit protocol. He also served as visit team coach and helped the Fellows develop the necessary skills to serve as chairs. During the 1998-99 school year, twenty-one SALT visits took place, and more than 300 Rhode Island teachers served on those teams.

When asked to evaluate their experience after each visit, team members made invaluable suggestions about how to improve the protocol. Participants from host schools, chairs and other visit team members participated in several formal and informal feedback sessions. Marianne Crocker and Ann Anabella prepared written evaluation reports of the visit and its impact on schools, providing another perspective on how well the

visit had worked. While all of this feedback contributed to this document, those who chaired teams made the most important contributions.¹

In July 1999, Tom Wilson began work on this edition of the *SALT Handbook*. The SALT Fellows, who included Michael Barnes and Sandy Olson (appointed in July 1999), completed several reviews of *Handbook* sections. Participants in a July 1999 Rhode Island College seminar, *Chairing the SALT Visit*, critiqued an early draft. All the SALT Fellows reviewed a much later draft during the July 2000 course for Fellows. Ken Fish, Rick Richards, Susan Rotblat-Walker, Diane Devine, other SALT Leadership Team members, and RIDE staff critiqued the early drafts.

The increased experience with the conduct of the visit and the growing understanding of its methodology for knowing schools made it evident that this document would become more than a revision of the old one. That is why it is called *The Handbook for SALT Visit Chairs*, 1st Edition.

WHAT'S NEW IN THIS 2ND EDITION OF THE *HANDBOOK*

A number of things changed during the last four years of the SALT school visit. One-hundred-and-thirty additional schools have been visited, bringing the total to 235 schools, since the beginning of the visit in 1997. Five additional Rhode Island teachers have served as chairs. The chairs have taken on new responsibilities, the most important one being to help schools translate what the team reports mean to them in terms of their school improvement plans. Many refinements have been made in the protocol to strengthen the rigor and utility of the visit. Probably the most important is the new clarity about the importance of the perspective of the school as an integral part of the evidence a visit team considers. Finally, the importance of finding better ways to assess school performance in order to augment the information gleaned from state-wide testing has grown in the national attention.

This 2nd edition of the *Handbook* was a major revision in text and format from the first. It incorporated the principles of Practice-based Inquiry®. It received extensive review by certified SALT chairs: Carol Belair, Margaret Della Bitta, Ruth Haynsworth and Donna Reinalda. They reviewed and critiqued key text in a special five-day workshop conducted for that purpose in May 2004.

¹ For a full description of evaluation/feedback activities through June 2001 see: *SALT 360° Feedback and Evaluation Study*. SALT Research Team. September 2001.

The format was redesigned to make it easier for chairs, teams, schools, RIDE staff and citizens to use.

2ND EDITION REVISED SEPTEMBER 2006

This 2nd revision of the 2nd Edition included many updates and editorial changes to ready the *Handbook* for the 2006-7 visits (the 11th year of SALT visits).

The change in format will be more noticeable to the casual reader than the change in substance. Sections that were before part of the total *Handbook for Chairs* are now separated. The *Handbook* provides a challenge to SALT chairs, important background about the SALT visit and a tool to connect to the documents that are key to the conduct of the SALT school visit. This change is in response to the wider use of the *Handbook* by Rhode Island Schools and to the influence of modern document management that utilizes the internet.

The 2005-06 SALT fellows-- Andre Audette, Margaret Dell Bitta, Catherine Hutz and Ruth Haynsworth--played an important role in the latest review and editing of the *Handbook*.

Thomas A. Wilson and Leslie Oh of Catalpa Ltd. are responsible for the writing, editing and lay-out.

ORGANIZATION OF HANDBOOK

The “theoretical” section on **Practice-Based Inquiry[®]** is now presented as a separate Catalpa Ltd. document, entitled *Foundations and Fundamentals: Defining Practice-Based Inquiry[®]*. It has been substantially revised and is available as a separate document from Catalpa Ltd. and is accessible at www.Catalpa.org.

The sections of the *Handbook* are:

About the SALT visit provides key background information for chairs about the history and purpose of the SALT visit.

The *SALT School Visit Protocol* is the central document of the *Handbook*. This is the basic document that governs the conduct of the visit.

The collection of *SALT School Visit Documents* provide considerable detail for chairs about how the visit works, expectations for quality and general guidance based on eleven years of experience. It is presented as separate electronic document to facilitate its use by chairs and others.

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WHAT HAPPENS ON A VISIT

Between May 1997 and June 2006, 1,644 Rhode Island educators visited 292 Rhode Island public schools on SALT school visits. Of these, more than 1,400 were practicing Rhode Island teachers and administrators.

Depending on the size and complexity of the visited school, there have been between five and 21 members on a visit team. Most team members have been practicing Rhode Island public school teachers. The visit guidelines require that the majority of team members be practicing teachers. A practicing teacher chairs each team. SALT Fellows, who are classroom teachers on special assignment from their districts to RIDE, serve as team chairs. Each team includes a Rhode Island school administrator and ideally, when possible, a parent.² In addition, other members of the team may represent higher education, school committees, and/or leaders from a school district or RIDE.

The team is charged to write a public report containing its considered conclusions about how well a school is doing in each of three SALT focus areas: (1) Student learning, (2) Teaching for learning, and (3) School support for learning and teaching. The report includes only those conclusions that have met the required tests for conclusions as specified by the visit methodology, which include that all team members must reach consensus agreement and that each conclusion is accurate and that it has constructive implications for the school.

During five consecutive days, a team usually spends 55 hours at the school. The team follows a schedule that has been carefully designed to maximize the visit as a process of peer inquiry. During the first three-and-a-half days the team attends to what actually is happening inside the school, with a particular focus on what is happening in its classrooms. The team spends the last day-and-a-half completing its written report.

The chair is responsible for seeing that the team follows the procedures of the visit as closely as possible to ensure the legitimacy and value of its report.

Most teachers report that serving on a visit team has been an intense and demanding professional exercise. In a recent survey 80% of teachers

² Parents often sit on the School Improvement Team of their home school.

called the visit “the most powerful professional development experience” of their teaching careers.³

³ *SALT Team Member Survey*. Catalpa Ltd. May 2004.

WHY CONDUCT SALT VISITS

In 1997, the Board of Regents for public education in Rhode Island sought to redefine school accountability so that it would be an effective tool of school improvement. The set of accountability principles that were adopted by the Regents at that time led directly to the generation of a system of school accountability called SALT: School Accountability for Learning and Teaching. The SALT school visit is an important component of the SALT system.

Although SALT clearly places the central responsibility for improving learning on the school, it realizes that the school cannot improve by itself. State and district offices, school committees, the legislature, state and local political leaders, business and community leaders, parents and other citizens—all share responsibility for the quality of public education. If SALT is to achieve its purpose, it must become a vital tool that the school may use for its own improvement, and at the same time it must inform those whose opinions and actions directly contribute to the school's ability to improve.

The visit mutually supports and works in concert with the other SALT components, which include: the School Self-Study, the School Improvement Plan and the post-visit revision of the School Improvement Plan. The full cycle of SALT components is designed to ensure dramatic progress in student learning.

Although the school visit was designed to be responsive to all of the SALT principles ([1.1.0.1 PR RD Principles of SALT.doc](#)), the sixth principle is particularly key to the visit:

“The purpose of SALT is to acquire useful information about what is happening in schools so that productive accountability is possible.”

It goes on to explain:

“The quality of knowledge about schools and what is happening in them will determine how effective accountability will be for improving them. An information system that pushes towards continuous school improvement will be based on assessment of student progress. It will also generate knowledge for making valid judgments about the quality of actual conditions at a school.

Finally, it will provide information to determine whether district and state policies support school improvement.”

The knowledge gained from the SALT visit serves many complex purposes and offers many benefits:

- ϕ It pointedly addresses the central question of accountability for each school: “How well is this school doing at its central task, student learning?”
- ϕ It provides the school and RIDE with a coherent report that contains the conclusions that an outside group of professional peers has decided best represent the central issues shaping the school’s performance. These conclusions are set within the three SALT focus areas. The visit team identifies the most important and immediate issues that it thinks the school faces in improving its learning and teaching.
- ϕ It provides a critical tool for the school for planning how it can immediately strengthen its learning and teaching.
- ϕ It provides RIDE, the school district, parents and concerned citizens with a timely, coherent, legitimate public report on how well a school is performing.
- ϕ It supplements established information systems with one that focuses directly on the complexities of actual classroom and school practice.
- ϕ It provides school practitioners with a unique and important professional development opportunity.

WHY THE SALT VISIT WORKS

The SALT visit works because it is built on the principles of Practice-based Inquiry[®].⁴ Distinguishing attributes of the SALT visit include:

- ϕ SALT visits generate practice-based knowledge about a particular school that contributes to the objectives of both accountability and school-support.
- ϕ The SALT visit team seeks to understand the particular attributes and dynamics of the host school and deliberately avoids comparing one school with another.
- ϕ The team has the explicit charge to build conclusions that are both accurate and useful for the school.
- ϕ The team builds the substance of its conclusions from what it learns about what actually is happening in the school and what school participants think about what is happening in their school.
- ϕ How human perspective shapes knowledge is critical to the design of any information system. The procedures of the visit ensure the balance and utility of the team's perspective.
- ϕ The team uses what it has learned about a school to shape the wording of its conclusions so that they will effectively support, encourage or provoke the school to take immediate and productive steps to improve its learning performance. The school comes to understand that the team's report is useful because it directly expresses what it thinks in a unanimous voice and in language that school practitioners understand.
- ϕ The team integrates state standards for learning and the results of state assessments of student learning and other source of information, such as the SALT survey, into its analysis. These are used as important reference points for considering how well a school is building an effective, standards-based approach to learning and teaching. While a team frequently will discuss how well a school is doing

⁴ Practice-based Inquiry[®] is a registered trademark of Catalpa Ltd.

against the performance of schools statewide, it does not compare schools or districts.

- ϕ Team members build conclusions from their usually untapped knowledge, skills and wisdom as school practitioners. This provides a basis for increasing practitioner knowledge, skills and wisdom.
- ϕ During the course of a visit, team members come to understand that a professional who wants to improve her practice will value the accurate observation of her classroom-in-action by a group of peers.
- ϕ The team sustains itself during its long hours and complex work by its intense fascination with trying to solve the puzzle of what to say about the school. This work is further supported by the professional aspirations of team members, as school practitioners, to better understand and improve their own practice. These aspirations are often overlooked in modern accountability plans.

HISTORY OF THE RIGOR OF THE SALT VISIT

The use of school visit teams to assess the performance of schools has played a major role in school accountability in several countries for more than a century. In 1839 the British government established school visits by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) to assess teaching and learning in Britain's new primary schools, which Parliament had just begun to support with public funds. Inspection visits supported by government agencies became common throughout the Commonwealth, Germany, Holland, Ireland, Sweden, and Flanders. Other European nations also have an ongoing tradition of school visits.

Most American high schools know about the school visit process because a regional accrediting association team has visited them to see whether their schools measure up to the standards set by the association. The American tradition of school visits began in 1871 at the University of Michigan. Voluntary, regional accrediting organizations spread throughout the United States in the early part of the 20th Century. Procedures to award institutional accreditation in medicine and law enforcement also grew, and these always include on-site visits.

The school visit tradition has focused on a team understanding what actually goes on in a school, coming to judgments about its quality and making suggestions for its improvement. Any actual or perceived lack of rigor in the design of the protocols for most of these visits has raised serious questions about the legitimacy of visit team findings.

Visit protocols usually are developed without a strong focus on assuring their methodological rigor. This applies to protocols currently in use by most of the American school accrediting associations and by the newer applications, as well. Visit protocols are more likely to be developed to meet the objectives of professional development or planning than those of inquiry into school performance. For example, the Learning Walk™⁵ is a better tool for inducing better school management than it is for conducting a rigorous inquiry into what is actually taking place in a school.

Since rigor is not perceived as the overriding issue, designers of various current protocols will argue that one protocol is as good as another. They will argue that it is more important for the visit to fit the intervention or

⁵ Learning Walk™ is a trademark of the Institute for Learning, University of Pittsburg. Practice-based Inquiry® is a registered trademark of Catalpa Ltd.

planning objective than for it to be a serious inquiry. Unfortunately, this lack of concern about rigor results in our continuing dependence on a system that relies solely on test scores to measure school performance, since that is the only system that can make the claim of legitimacy.

In 1992, Thomas A. Wilson devoted his full attention to how to design a visit protocol to assure that it would support solid claims for the legitimacy of the visit findings. Four years of intensive field study of how visits were, in fact, conducted by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and district inspectors in England and by the Commission of Secondary Schools of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges strengthened his conviction that visits could become a powerful tool for dramatic and continuous growth in student learning offered by American public schools.^{6,7} In 1996, he founded Catalpa Ltd., "The Professional Visit Organization."

Catalpa has worked for the last ten years on developing and refining the visit protocol. Drawing upon initial field research and the ongoing study of several theoretical issues and constructs (e.g. professional judgment), Catalpa has taken the lead in developing several visit protocols to meet the purposes of different educational agencies.⁸ The most important of these has been Catalpa's nine-year partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). Catalpa designed the SALT visit (SALT: School Accountability for Learning the Teaching) with RIDE staff and Rhode Island educators. Catalpa has provided ongoing, direct assistance to RIDE in its implementation of the SALT visit for the last six years.

The constructs of **Practice-based Inquiry®** (PBI) evolved during this time. Working with a mix of theoretical concerns and practical experience,

⁶ Thomas A. Wilson. *Reaching for a Better Standard: English school inspection and the dilemma of accountability for American public schools*. Teachers College Press, 1996.

⁷ Thomas A. Wilson. *Visiting Accreditation*. LAB at Brown. 1999.

⁸ Besides SALT and NEASC, Catalpa consultations about the school visit include California Department of Education, Illinois Department of Education, Minneapolis Public Schools, Chicago Public Schools, the Panasonic Foundation, Chicago Public Education Fund, Pew Foundation, SchoolWorks and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.

Catalpa identified a number of critical elements to establish the rigor necessary for a visit protocol to assure that its findings are legitimate. The result, **Practice-based Inquiry®**, provides an articulated structure for how the visit works best as a method of inquiry. The companion document, *Foundations and Fundamentals of Practice-Based Inquiry®* explains that structure. It also provides the basis for the accreditation of the SALT school visit protocol as a legitimate **Practice-Based Inquiry®** protocol.

SECTION TWO

THE SALT VISIT PROTOCOL

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF SALT

The design and implementation of the School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT) visit began in 1996. Since the SALT visit was originally conceived as part of RIDE's school-based accountability initiative, the importance of showing the validity of team conclusions is obvious. A public agency cannot make decisions about a school on the basis of "questionable" findings.

The accuracy of SALT visit findings also matter when RIDE considers them in policy development and in taking direct intervention steps in schools. They are currently used to some extent in local school planning and in planning progressive support and intervention strategies. Thus the legitimacy of the visit findings is central to any evaluation of RIDE's investment over the last seven years in the design and implementation of the SALT visit.

More detail on the history of SALT is included in Section One of the Handbook.

1. THE SALT VISIT, CATALPA LTD. AND Practice-based Inquiry®

The history of the development of the SALT visit is intertwined with the history of the partnership between RIDE and Catalpa Ltd. Working with RIDE staff and Rhode Island school leaders and teachers, Catalpa designed the original SALT visit protocol in 1997. During the last seven years, working closely with the teachers who chaired the visits and with RIDE senior staff, Catalpa Ltd. has provided oversight to the evolution of that protocol. Additional Catalpa Ltd. responsibilities for SALT have included coaching the chairs and teams, providing professional development for the chairs, endorsing final reports, developing methods for cross-report analysis and studying various effects of the enterprise.

In 2005, the SALT visit protocol is in accord with the principles of Practice-based Inquiry®. Early versions were in accord with the precursors of Practice-based Inquiry® (The Foundations of the Catalpa Visit). Working with RIDE to design, implement and revise the SALT visit has been critical to Catalpa Ltd. in developing Practice-based Inquiry®.

2. FUNCTION OF THE PROTOCOL

The primary function of the SALT visit protocol is to set the conditions, standards, expectations and procedures for chairs, teams, hosting schools and RIDE.

This protocol makes the design of the SALT visit inquiry public and easily accessible by teams, schools, RIDE staff and citizens. This increases the validity of the SALT visit report and the value of the visit as a process of public school accountability.

3. ACCREDITATION OF SALT PROTOCOL

Catalpa Ltd. accredits this SALT visit protocol (2005). This protocol successfully builds upon the elements of the visit as inquiry, upon the structures that assure rigor and upon the procedures that assure the legitimacy of Practice-based Inquiry®.

The methodological backbone of this protocol is its consistency with the principles of Practice-based Inquiry®. If a visit team, the host school and RIDE all follow this protocol reasonably well and closely, the findings in the team's report will be accurate and important for that school, and it will have a strong claim for legitimacy.⁹

This protocol clearly integrates the basic elements of the visit inquiry with the structures that provide rigor in a way that does not weaken the elements but that does fulfill the inquiry purpose for the SALT visit.

This protocol meets or exceeds all specifications of Practice-based Inquiry® including those that assure legitimacy. The protocol sets clear expectations for host schools and a well developed system for the visited school to challenge its report. The protocol includes systems to certify team membership and the training of teams and team chairs.

The most important current concern is the need to strengthen the recruitment process so that it remains possible to meet the standards of the composition of team membership.

Catalpa Ltd. will review the protocol each year and inform RIDE of its continued endorsement and any issues of concern.

A review of this accreditation is scheduled for August 2007.

⁹ See *Can You Trust the Findings of a SALT Visit?* Thomas A. Wilson. In process.

4. ORGANIZATION AND FORMAT

Sections

The protocol is organized in general accord with the Practice-based Inquiry[®] outline for a protocol.

Documents

The protocol includes numerous documents that provide details on the design and conduct of the SALT visit.¹⁰ The SALT documents are divided between:

Protocol Documents (PR)

PR documents provide further elaboration on a specific element of the SALT visit protocol. They are part and parcel of this protocol, separate for better presentation to the reader.

Guidance Documents (GU)

GU documents provide advice on how to carry out a specific element of the SALT visit protocol. Each one is directed to a specific audience, usually the chair and, less frequently, the school, team members or RIDE.

While a guidance document does not have the standing of a protocol document, there is a continuous evolution whereby advice in a guidance document becomes over time expected practice. That means it may well become part of the protocol during the next annual protocol review.

The visit is like other methods of inquiry. It improves through practice over time.

Forms and letters (FO)

FO documents do not have protocol standing, beyond the general point that the visit must be clearly managed.

Packets (PA)

¹⁰ **Note:** This is the comprehensive and current list of approved SALT documents. Any SALT document dated before July 2004 is not current, with the exception of some SALT Guides.

These are collections of SALT documents used for specific events, e.g. team training, reading of the report, etc.

SALT Guides

SALT started publishing a set of guides for schools in 1999. Those that are mentioned in the protocol are still current.

DEFINED FOCUS

1. THE PURPOSE OF A SALT VISIT

The purpose for conducting a SALT visit is to generate legitimate information about how well a school is performing in advancing student learning.

The central responsibility of the SALT visit team is to build conclusions about a school's performance and to prepare a public, written report that effectively presents those conclusions. Conclusions must be accurate and useful in improving learning in the visited school. A key indication of the report's effectiveness is that the school understands what the team has concluded and begins to see what action will move it forward.

The SALT visit is designed to serve the students of Rhode Island public schools by generating legitimate conclusions about the quality and effectiveness of how well the actual daily life of schools, with a particular focus on teaching in classrooms, fosters and results in good learning. It is designed to be consistent with the principles of SALT, as defined by the Board of Regents. Those principles hold that legitimate findings about actual school practice contribute greatly to the effectiveness of school, district and state accountability and support of schools to improve student learning.

SALT Protocol Documents

SVP 2.1.0.1 PR AG Principles of R.I. School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)

SVP 2.1.0.2 PR CH Why conduct SALT visits

2. THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND FOCUS AREAS

The central research questions for a SALT team are:

How well are students learning?

How well are teachers teaching so that students learn?

How well does the school support learning and teaching?

The heart of the team's inquiry is to understand how well students are learning and why.

The team's inquiry is specified by three SALT foci that extend the research questions. The team is charged to write 3-7 conclusions for each focus area that answer the research question for each area:

Student Learning

Teaching for Learning

School Support for Learning and Teaching

The focus areas are nested in concentric circles with Student Learning at their center. The next circle is Teaching for Learning; the third is School Support for Teaching and Learning.

Teams are expected to link their conclusions about teaching and school support to their conclusions about learning. A team considers first how well students are learning in the visited school and then constructs conclusions that explain why students are learning at the level they are.

SALT Protocol Documents

SVP 2.2.0.1 PR TM Introduction to SALT focus area

SVP 2.2.0.2 PR TM Focusing on learning

SVP 2.2.0.3 PR TM Focusing on teaching for learning

SVP 2.2.0.4 PR TM Focusing on school support for learning and teaching

3. OUTLINE OF THE REPORT

The outline of the report is pre-established. The three focus areas are at the center of the outline structure. While the team has unusual control over what issues it can address within the report structure, it cannot change the outline.

SALT Protocol Documents

SVP 2.3.0.1 PR CH The importance of the written report

SVP 2.3.0.1 PR TM The report outline

SALT Guidance Documents

SVP 2.3.0.2 GU CH Contingencies when writing about leadership

SVP 2.3.0.3 GU CH How to use the report outline

VISIT ELEMENTS

1. EVIDENCE

Good evidence about what actually is happening at the visited school is so important to the purpose of the SALT visit that a team must expend a large part of its total effort collecting evidence. Gathering evidence includes collecting it, describing it to the team, judging its accuracy, sorting it into important issues that make sense (given what the team knows) and building generalizations about those issues based on the evidence.

Evidence must exist in the school. It is seen, heard or read by one or more team members during the visit. Team members may use their prior knowledge and/or opinions of a school to formulate questions and to guide the team's evidence gathering. However, the team cannot use its prior knowledge of the school as evidence to support its conclusions, unless it has verified that during the visit. Unverified knowledge is considered "hearsay" evidence, and it is not admissible.

Teams must seek evidence about the action of the school--What is happening now? What are people doing now? What is the school's practice now? It must also seek out evidence about the school's perspective about what it does.

Guidance about what evidence a team should collect must be presented in the form of general issues and possible questions team members can ask school participants, each other and themselves. To prescribe precisely what evidence a team should collect would detract from the accuracy of the evidence. Such a list would limit the team's focus to a pre-conceived conceptual scheme, rather than allow the team to focus on the actual life of a particular school at a particular time.

When the team considers evidence that it has not generated, such as state test results, the SALT Survey, an accreditation report or an evaluation report of a program in the school, it must consider that evidence in a manner that is consistent with the rules that governed the collection and interpretation of that evidence. For example, the team cannot banter about test scores without regarding the discipline, procedures and rules that generated them or the decisions that give them significance.

Evidence cannot be collected as if it were separate from any generalized idea or perception that led the team to it. Yet, the team member must be

careful that his pre-conceptions and working conclusions do not limit the evidence he collects. Thus, particularly during the first two days of a visit, team members must be aware of the ongoing tension between evidence and generalizations. They must consciously counter a forming generalization with evidence and at the same time ask if the evidence supports a different generalization.

When a team member is building a generalization, he should be hunting for evidence that challenges the generalization. When he is trying to solve a puzzle or form a new generalization to explain an issue, he should focus on collecting evidence that would either support or challenge his take on the issue.

Any team member may challenge the accuracy of any evidence that any other team member introduces in the team discussion.

Disagreement about evidence and apparent discontinuities in what the team is seeing in the school drive the team to collect more evidence to resolve the problem.

A team member must not use evidence to support a conclusion that the team, as a whole, does not accept as certain. If a team member feels that the team has made a wrong decision about the accuracy of a piece of evidence, her first task is to persuade her team members to re-examine the evidence in question.

When a team reaches final deliberated consensus agreement on a conclusion, it must again consider whether it has the evidence to support that conclusion.

Practice-based Inquiry[®] Documents

PBI 3.1.0.1 PR CH The nature of visit evidence

SALT Guidance Documents

SVP 3.1.0.1 GU TM Questioning members of the school community

SVP 3.1.0.2 GU TM Talking with students

SVP 3.1.0.3 GU TM Focusing on student work

SVP 3.1.0.4 GU TM Focusing on the school improvement plan

SVP 3.1.05 GU TM Questions for team room debriefings

2. PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT

SALT visit teams must use their professional judgment to make sense of the complex, dynamic patterns of evidence that represent the real life of a school. Teams must be clear and forthright about their judgment when they write their conclusions. The conclusion must include what the team thinks so that the reader understands its perceptual base.

SALT teams must also rely on their corporate professional judgment to make decisions about a number of key inquiry questions including:

What are the important issues for this school to consider?

Is our evidence about this school accurate?

Do our conclusions and our report meet their respective tests?

Are our conclusions and report useful to this school as a tool to improve its performance in learning and teaching?

The team's professional judgment is built from the different generalized pre-conceptions and perceptions of its individual members pushed against the particular evidence of the visited school. The team's corporate, professional judgment is built through its discussion and its struggle with what team members have seen and what they think about what they have seen. The emerging professional judgment of the team holds the inquiry process together and makes the team's findings coherent.

Teams must be careful to distinguish between their perceptions and the perspectives of people in the school. Evidence about the perspectives of school participants is a critical source of evidence. The team's professional judgment grows from the early perceptions of individual members of the school.

Practice-based Inquiry® Documents

PBI 3.2.0.3 PR CH How professional judgment works on a visit team

SALT Protocol Documents

SVP 3.2.0.1 PR CH Action, perceptions, perspective and judgment

SALT Guidance Documents

SVP 3.2.0.2 GU CH How to help the team use its professional judgment in writing visit conclusions

3. TEAM DELIBERATED CONSENSUS

The SALT visit team uses deliberated consensus to make decisions that substantively determine its public findings. This includes the wording of the conclusions in the final report and its decisions on these questions:

Is the evidence used to support a conclusion accurate?

Does the wording of the conclusion represent the best judgment of the team?

Do the conclusions and the report meet their respective tests?

Any SALT team member has the power and authority to stop a decision simply by not agreeing to it. If any member does not agree with a decision and if the team sees no benefit in further discussing it, the team does not include that decision in its report. Minority reports are not permitted.

Deliberated consensus is a tool to test the team's certainty that what it reports is right. The requirement that the team agree by deliberated consensus pushes the team to resolve its own ambiguities, correct any discrepancies in its evidence, and limit the ambiguity in how it words each conclusion. Thus, deliberated consensus strengthens the underlying rigor and legitimacy of the final report.

The requirement that the team reach agreement through deliberated consensus implies that each team member must pay close attention to what every other member has to say. It pushes team members to be open about the uncertainties they see in the evidence they have found and to raise disagreements with other team members about issues of judgment. It requires team members to resolve discrepancies and work out disagreements among themselves so that they can complete their most important task—building conclusions. It pushes the team to find better evidence and to come to better decisions.

This rigor often leads team members to feel considerable team pride and cohesion. They know they have accomplished important work together, and they could not have achieved that without the difficult work of a disciplined rigor. It is the team, while it is in session during the visit, that

bears the weight of responsibility for ensuring the legitimacy of the report.

Consistent with the requirements of reaching decisions by team deliberated consensus, after the team has disbanded, only the chair has the authority to edit the report. The chair is charged not to make any changes unless they are consistent with his understanding of the team's intent or explicit instructions. The chair is also limited in how much she can interpret the report for the school. The report must stand on its own.

Practice-based Inquiry® Documents

PBI 3.3.0.1 GU CH Building team deliberated consensus

NECESSARY CONSTRAINTS TO PROMOTE RIGOR

1. FOCUS

While *Focus* is a Practice-based Inquiry[®] structure for rigor, it is presented in the first section of this protocol.

2. DEFINITION OF CONCLUSIONS

The SALT visit is a conclusion driven process.

The team's findings are expressed in the form of its conclusions about how well the team thinks the school is doing in each of the three focus areas.

These conclusions are the basis for granting "commendations" and making "recommendations" in each focus area and for the two summary sections of the report: *Portrait of the School* and *Final Advice*.

The team must base each of its conclusions on a thorough discussion of the evidence that supports it. In its report the team must list at least two sources of evidence that accurately support each conclusion. These sources are listed in parentheses after each conclusion.

SALT Protocol Documents

SVP 4.2.0.1 PR TM Conclusions, recommendations and commendations

SALT Guidance Documents

SVP 4.2.0.1 GU CH How to lead the team in writing conclusions

3. REVIEW CRITERIA FOR CONCLUSIONS AND REPORT

For a team to include a conclusion in its final report, team members must test the conclusion and unanimously agree that it:

Is important.

Is set in the present.

Is accurate.

Shows the judgment of the full team.

For a report to be declared final and complete, the team members must test the report and unanimously agree that the report is:

Fair

Useful

Persuasive

SALT Protocol Documents

SVP 2.3.0.1 PR CH The importance of the written report

SVP 4.3.0.1 PR TM Review criteria for conclusions

SVP 4.3.0.2 PR TM Review criteria for the report

SALT Guidance Documents

SVP 4.3.0.3 GU CH How to lead the team in testing conclusions and the report

4. SCHEDULE--TIME AND EVENTS

It is easy to see that a visit is composed of many events—the schedule of the visit, as well as the pre- and post-visit events.

Each of these events involves detailed logistics. If these details are omitted or poorly managed, they can intrude on the visit and distract both the team and the school from the central purpose of the visit. The school is also responsible for logistics. But the chair has an interest in how well the school meets its responsibility. Even if the school does not manage its side of the logistics well, the team can learn from that. But there is no benefit from this situation in reverse; it does not serve a team well to manage its logistics sloppily.

Visit schedule

The SALT visit schedule is an important protocol element for designing the structure of the visit as a legitimate inquiry.

In order to best meet the purpose of the SALT visit inquiry, the design of the visit schedule makes deliberate use of the order of events, the allocation of limited time to different functions, the pace of the team's experience with the school and the chair's authority to control time.

The master schedule is tailored by the chair, working with the school, to fit that school's particular circumstances. Chairs understand the limits of flexibility in making changes in order to keep the design principles intact. Major changes of events require the chair to consult with Catalpa Ltd. to be sure that the change is within the limits of flexibility.

The guidance document, *How to use the visit schedule*, provides the chair with the guidance of an overall picture of how the visit is conducted.

SALT Protocol Documents

SVP 4.4.0.1 PR CH Schedule for SALT visit

SALT Guidance Documents

SVP 4.4.0.2 GU CH Elements behind the schedule

SVP 4.4.0.3 GU CH How to use the visit schedule

SVP 4.4.0.4 GU TM PM Notes for how to start meetings during the school visit

Forms

SVP 4.4.0.5 FO TM Form for Monday's schedule

Pre-visit events

The chair is responsible for managing these events:

Initial phone call with the principal

This is the chair's first official contact in her working relationship with the principal and the school. The chair completes the form: SVP 4.4.2.2 FO CH *Basic information about the school* and sends the form SVP 4.4.2.3 FO SC *What information schools provide for the Profile* to the principal.

Protocol Document

SVP 4.4.2.1 PR CH Initial phone call with principal

Form Documents

SVP 4.4.2.2 FO CH Basic information about school

SVP 4.4.2.3 FO SC What information schools provide for the *Profile*

Initial meeting with school leadership

This working meeting with the principal and other school leaders is key to the school's management of the visit. It introduces the school to the nuts of bolts of what the school needs to do to prepare for the visit.

SALT Protocol Document

SVP 4.4.2.4 PR CH Initial meeting with school leadership

SALT Form Documents

SVP 4.4.2.5 FO SC Teacher form for student work sample

SVP 4.4.2.6 FO SC Chair's steps for leadership meeting re: SALT visit at _____ school

Information meeting with school staff and faculty

The chair meets with the staff and the school faculty for an hour to explain how the visit works and to answer any questions or concerns they may have.

SALT Protocol Documents

SVP 4.4.2.1 PR CH Information meeting with staff and faculty of the school

Post-visit events

The chair is responsible for managing these events.

Reading the report

The chair usually reads the report to the school faculty and staff on Thursday, during the week following the visit.

SALT Protocol Documents

SVP 4.4.3.1 PR CH Reading the report

Factual Review

The chair confers with the principal three days after the reading of the report so that the principal may identify any factual errors in the report.

(The factual review is an event in the post-visit endorsement procedures described above in the Legitimacy of Findings Section of the protocol. The guidance to schools also describes this event.)

SALT Protocol Documents

SVP 4.7.1.3 GU SC How the host school can best manage the SALT school visit

SVP 5.7.0.1 PR RD Protocol for Catalpa Ltd. endorsement of SALT school visit reports

SALT Forms

SVP 4.4.3.2 FO SC Letter to principal for factual review

Post visit support

A SALT visit chair is responsible for providing a post-visit session for the school improvement team at the school on how to use the

report for school action planning. This critical step helps the school turn the report into action that is tailored to its own dynamics and circumstances.

Usually the chair who chairs the visit will not lead the post-visit session.

SALT Guidance Documents

SVP 4.4.3.3 GU CH Preparing for post-visit support session

SALT Forms

SVP 4.4.3.4 FO CH Post-visit support agenda

SVP 4.4.3.5 FO SC Template and example of action plan

SVP 4.4.3.6 FO SC Worksheet for developing action plans

SVP 4.4.3.7 FO CH Post-visit support feedback form

5. TEAM COMPOSITION, SELECTION AND TRAINING

Team composition and selection

See Section 3 in ***Procedures for legitimacy, Certification that team members meet team membership criteria***

Team Training

Each chair, with the assistance of SALT staff, conducts a training session for her visit team. Each team member must attend a training session before the visit.

SALT Protocol Documents

SVP 4.5.0.1 PR CH Chair responsibilities for team training

SALT Guidance Documents

SVP 4.5.0.2 GU CH How to conduct single team training session

SALT Forms

SVP 4.5.0.2 FO CH Agenda for team training

SVP 4.5.0.1 FO RD Reflection sheet for SALT visit

Recruiting team members

(In process February 2005)

6. CLARITY ABOUT LOGISTICS

The heart of the chair's work is guiding the team and making the countless number of decisions that become the real history of how a particular visit was conducted. The chair needs to respond wisely to a wide range of possibilities so that the team writes the report as well as possible.

Preparations for the visit

The chair is responsible for a number of critical areas of logistics in preparing for the visit to each specific school. These include:

1. Customizing documents for that visit (e.g. the schedule of the visit).
2. Checking that the appropriate equipment, supplies and binders are ready for the visit and other events.
3. Conducting a number of events at the school before and after the visit.
4. Working with the RIDE visit coordinator to assure that a team's membership is complete and appropriate.
5. Checking with RIDE staff for information or RIDE's policy position on issues that the chair sees as important in the team's inquiry at the particular school.
6. Active discussion with Catalpa Ltd. about issues that call any aspect of the visit into question in terms of its legitimacy.

SALT Protocol Documents

SVP 4.6.0.1 PR CH Chair preparations for a SALT visit

SALT Forms

SVP 4.6.0.2 FO CH Essential items for visit checklist

SVP 4.6.0.3 FO CH Letter to team members

SVP 4.6.0.4 FO CH Template for schedule for school events

SVP 4.6.0.5 FO CH Roster of the team members of the SALT visit to ____

SVP 2.3.0.4 PR CH Report template (dot)

SVP 4.6.0.6 FO CH Information to e-mail to Catalpa before the visit

Managing technology

While the SALT visit is decidedly a human event, the team could not write its report with the degree of legitimacy expected without a competent use of computing technology; specifically, the chair must know how to write in Word on a laptop computer and to use an LCD projector.

The chair must be able to master this technology at this level of competency.

SALT Guidance Documents

SVP 4.6.2.1 GU CH How to set up computer, use the report template and customize the school report

SVP 4.6.2.2 GU TM Codes for sources of evidence

SVP 4.6.2.3 GU CH Short cut keys for SALT report template

7. CLARITY ABOUT DYNAMICS

School

SALT sets clear expectations for how the host school manages the visit.

How the school handles the team during the visit week is important to the inquiry. The chair has leadership responsibility to do all that he can within limited resources and time to acquaint the school with the purposes and procedures of the visit. Nevertheless, the school is responsible for how well it conducts its part in managing the visit week. For example, the school principal meets on a regular, daily basis with the chair in order to identify and solve any problems that arise.

SALT Protocol Documents

SVP 4.7.1.1 PR SC Expectations for how the host school manages a SALT school visit

SVP 5.1.0.1 PR SC How a host school can respond to its SALT visit report

SVP 4.7.1.2 PR SC Policy on food and gifts for SALT visit teams

SALT Guidance Documents

SVP 4.7.1.3 GU SC How the host schools can best manage the SALT school visit

Team

The school

The chair must be clear from the beginning about the importance of the interaction between the team and the school.

SALT Protocol Documents

SVP 4.7.1.0 PR TM Working with members of the school community

Managing team room

While the school should suggest which room the team might use during the visit week, the chair must approve the room.

The concern here is that the team has the appropriate space to carry out its intense work. Issues include privacy and the layout of the room.

SALT Guidance Documents

SVP 4.6.0.7 GU CH The ideal team room

PROCEDURES TO ASSURE LEGITIMACY

RIDE has adopted strong procedures to assure the legitimacy of the findings of a SALT visit. These procedures are consistent with Practice-based Inquiry®.

1. SCHOOL'S RESPONSE AND CHALLENGE OF REPORT

If a Rhode Island school has concerns about how the visit was conducted or whether the findings of its report are accurate, it may challenge the report.

The SALT visit has established clear procedures for how a school may challenge its report.

SALT Protocol Documents

SVP 5.1.0.1 PR SC How a host school can respond to its SALT visit report

2. REPORT EDITING AND PUBLICATION

The procedures the SALT chair uses to assure that the team agrees with the full draft report on Friday are included in *How to use the schedule*.

RIDE has established clear procedures for the editing and producing the report that assures that only the chair can change anything in the report after the team disbands.

RIDE has assured through these procedures that no school, district, RIDE official or staff member can change the wording and content of the report after the team has "locked the report."

SALT Protocol Documents

SVP 5.7.0.1 PR RD Protocol for Catalpa Ltd. endorsement of SALT school visit reports

SALT Forms

SVP 5.2.0.1 FO CH Steps for report preparation after the visit

SVP 5.2.0.2 FO CH Versions of report from the perspective of the chair

3. CERTIFICATION AND TRAINING OF CHAIRS

All SALT visits are conducted by chairs who are certified by Catalpa Ltd. When a chair is in training, the visit is closely monitored by certified chairs or the Catalpa coach to assure that the conduct is in accord with the protocol.

The chair leads the team and facilitates its work. RIDE certifies that chairs meet RIDE qualification standards. Catalpa Ltd. certifies that SALT chairs meet standards of expertise, skill and professionalism.

With respect to RIDE certification, SALT chairs are expected to have demonstrated they have acquired practitioner judgment based on practitioner experience (usually five years of teaching experience); they must previously have served as members of two SALT visit teams.

For Catalpa Ltd. certification, they must complete the intensive course on chairing offered by Catalpa Ltd. They must also demonstrate that they have skills at the level to assure the legitimacy of the report as determined by observation of a Catalpa visit coach. A-chair-in-training conducts all visits under the mentorship of a certified and experienced chair.

Ongoing Catalpa Ltd. certification is contingent on a chair's continuous participation in professional development, peer discussions and coaching in the practice of conducting visits.

Practice-based Inquiry[®] Protocol Documents

PBI 5.4.3.1 PR AG The chair's skills

PBI 5.4.3.2 PR AG Chair certification (in preparation)

4. CERTIFICATION THAT TEAM MEMBERS MEET MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA

The composition of SALT team membership is certified by RIDE.

SALT Teams are composed of active participants from the Rhode Island public school community, with an occasional person from outside that community.

Team members cannot reside in the district of the host school. They must attend a training session prior to the visit.

Team members represent the state's different professional and parent communities that touch public schooling. It is contrary to the principles

of SALT to require special expertise or experience of team members. There is no test of specific knowledge or skill to be a team member.

Teachers dominate the team. Since the primary focus of the team's report is the learning and teaching that actually takes place in Rhode Island schools, teachers must have a dominant voice. They are the professionals who best understand how to judge the real complexities of daily classroom life.

Yet, it is critical that other perspectives challenge the teacher perspective, e.g. local school administrators, parents and other professionals and public groups.

Before the team is seated, RIDE-SALT staff certify that the composition of the membership on each team has met the established standards for team composition. A visit may take place that does not meet these criteria only after discussion with the school. An uncertified team raises the question about the endorsement of the visit report, and such a visit will require additional monitoring by Catalpa Ltd.

While people may make special arrangements to observe the team, they must accept the conditions of a visitor's protocol to ensure that they do not unduly influence the content of the report.

SALT Protocol Documents

SVP 5.4.0.1 PR RD Certification of the composition of SALT visit teams

SVP 5.4.0.2 PR CH Protocol for observers of the SALT visit

SALT Guidance Documents

Recruitment and selection of team members (in preparation)

5. CODE OF CONDUCT

Before being seated as a SALT team member, each person must review the *Code of Conduct* and *Conflicts of Interest*. The person must then sign the *Code of Conduct*.

SALT Protocol Documents

SVP 5.5.0.1 PR TM Code of Conduct

SVP 5.5.0.2 PR TM Conflicts of interest for a team member in a host school

6. ENDORSEMENT OF CONDUCT OF VISITS AND TEAM REPORTS

The legitimacy of each SALT visit and its resulting report are endorsed by Catalpa Ltd.

The most important assurance of the legitimacy of a team's findings is that the actual conduct of a visit is in reasonable accord with all of the elements of the protocol.

After the chair submits the final version of the report, Catalpa Ltd. prepares a written endorsement of the visit and report, which becomes part of the final report.

Catalpa Ltd. decides whether or not to endorse the visit and the subsequent report as being legitimate. This decision is based on continuous monitoring of the visit and a careful review of both the pre-release report and the final report.

When there is an endorsement issue related to the conduct of the visit, the role of both the school and the team are reviewed.

The chair's responsibilities that tie directly to the endorsement of the visit and report include:

1. staying in close touch with Catalpa during the visit.
2. reading the report.
3. conducting the factual review.
4. preparing the final report.

SALT Protocol Documents

SVP 4.4.3.1 PR CH Reading the report

SVP 5.7.0.1 PR RD Protocol for Catalpa Ltd. endorsement of SALT school visit reports

SALT Guidance Documents

SVP 5.2.0.1 FO CH Steps for report preparation after the visit

SALT Forms

SVP 4.4.3.2 FO SC Letter to principal for factual review

SVP 5.2.0.2 FO CH Versions of report from the perspective of the chair

8. ACCREDITATION OF SALT VISIT PROTOCOL

The SALT visit protocol is accredited by Catalpa Ltd. The statement of accreditation appears in the ***Introduction*** section above.