DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 250 779 EA 017 253

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TITLE School District Personnel: A Crucial Role in School Improvement Efforts. A Study of Dissemination Efforts Supporting School Improvement.
INSTITUTION Network of Innovative Schools, Inc., Andover, Mass.
SPONS AGENCY Department of Education, Washington, DC. Office of Planning, Budget, and Evaluation.
PUB DATE Mar 82
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, NY, March 19-23, 1982).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Attitudes; Administrator Characteristics; *Administrator Role; *Educational Innovation; Elementary Secondary Education; Federal Programs; Government School Relationship; Models; *Program Administration; *Program Effectiveness; *Program Implementation; State School District Relationship; Teacher Improvement
IDENTIFIERS *Local Facilitators; Study of Dissemination Efforts Support Sch Improv

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on local (school district level) facilitators, or individuals with major responsibility for implementing federal or state-sponsored school improvement practices. It vers who they are, what roles they play, and how they contribute to various outcomes. The sample is from the Study of Dissemination Efforts Supporting School Improvement, a national study of the impact of four selected dissemination/school improvement strategies on teachers and schools in 146 districts. Of these, 66 districts (45 percent) have designated one or more persons as local facilitators--a total of 78 persons, including 35 curriculum coordinators, 10 other district personnel, 4 assistant principals, 1 guidance staff person, 1 assistant superintendent, and 27 others. Characteristics of these facilitators are described, including years of experience in various positions, professional activities, and inservice education. Next, data are provided on local facilitators' perceptions of the value of the practice they are helping to implement, and on their sense of ownership of the practice. This is followed by information on the time they spent and the roles they played in the school improvement effort. A description is provided, with accompanying data, of how local facilitators interact with external facilitators, and of how local facilitators influence the school improvement process. Two causal models are present that illuminate the variables influencing school improvement outcomes: individually focused (outcomes among individual teachers) and school-focused (outcomes at the organizational level). Charts and tables are included. (TE)

SCHOOL DISTRICT PERSONNEL:

A CRUCIAL ROLE IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS

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Pat L. Cox

A Study of Dissemination Efforts Supporting
School Improvement

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March 1982

Presented at American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, New York City, March 1982.

School District Personnel: A Crucial Role in School Improvement

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Recent studies of school improvement have highlighted the roles of external linking agents (Firestone and Corbett, 1981; Louis and Kell, 1981; Royster and Madey, 1980) and school principals (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Emrick & Peterson, 1978; Loucks & Hall, 1979), analyzed their contributions and plugged them into formulas for successful change. Another set of actors, whose role in the school improvement process has been neglected in much of the research, are school district level facilitators, referred to as "local facilitators" in this and companion papers. Because these people often perform a scanning and initiating function, may well have skills and information relevant to the implementation of a new practice, and have proximity to teachers needing ongoing assistance and support, their role has the potential for significantly enhancing school improvement efforts.

In this paper[1] we focus on individuals in this position: who they are, what roles they play, and how they contribute to various outcomes of school improvement. Our sample is from the Study of Dissemination Efforts Supporting School Improvement, a major national study that looked intensively at the impact of four selected dissemination/school improvement strategies on teachers and schools. For a description of the study and the models explaining the outcomes observed, please refer to Crandall, Bauchner, Loucks and Schmidt, 1982.

Local Facilitators: Who Are They?

Our study of federal dissemination strategies involved 146 school districts. In each district we attempted to identify individuals who had major responsibility for implementation of the practice under study and were located in the central office rather than in the school itself.[2] No more than two of these "local facilitators" were included from each district. In 80 districts (55%) we were unable to identify people in this role. In 55 districts (38%) we collected data from one facilitator; in 10 districts (7%) we involved

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[1]The research referred to in this paper was conducted under contract with the U.S. Department of Education, the Office of Planning, Budget and Evaluation. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department of Education, and no endorsement by the Department should be inferred.

[2]There were others, we knew, who might have major responsibility for implementation of the practice, particularly some at the building level such as the principal (Bauchner and Loucks, 1982). Since these people were already included in our sample at the building level, we used the local facilitator category to include others at the central office level whom we suspected also played a critical, if somewhat different, role.

two people; and in the remaining district (0.7%) (at the superintendent's request), we included three facilitators. These 78 people made up our sample of local facilitators. Table 1 shows how they were distributed across the four programs we studied.

Table 1
Distribution of Local Facilitators by Program

	NDN					
	Non-Title I	Title I	BEH	Title IV-C	State-Administered	Total
Number of sites	48	26	17	24	31	146
Number of local facilitators	27	19	2	24	6	78
Number of sites with local facilitators	23	16	2	19	5	65

Local facilitators for the practices we studied held a wide variety of positions in their school districts (see Table 2). Most often they were curriculum coordinators. Others were coordinators of categorical programs or district-level specialists.

Table 2
Positions of Local Facilitators

Role	Number in Sample
Curriculum Coordinator	35
Other District Personnel	10
Assistant Principal*	4
Guidance or Psychological Services Staff	1
Assistant Superintendent	1
Other	27
Total	78

*These four individuals had dual roles as building administrators and curriculum coordinators.

What Are They Like?

We asked local facilitators several questions that help us describe their characteristics as educators. They were experienced in their jobs, with an average tenure of more than five years; they also had experience in other jobs at the school and district level (see Table 3).

Table 3
Local Facilitator Job Experience

	Number of Respondents	Average Number of Years
Experience in current position	65	5.4
Experience as a teacher	69	10.7
Experience as a building administrator	16	7.1
Experience as a district level administrato	37	6.5
Experience in another capacity in education	36	5.0

Our local facilitators were professionally active. When asked how many professional meetings or conferences they had attended in the past two years, their responses averaged 25. In that same time period, they averaged 2.5 college courses, regularly read four professional journals or magazines, and attended an average of nine training events related to their jobs. It can probably be assumed that these data are somewhat inflated, given the social desirabilty of attending to one's professional growth. However, it is also safe to speculate that individuals in these roles have more time and opportunity to engage in these behaviors, in addition to the fact that many such activities are within the realm of their job descriptions (e.g., keeping up-to-date with new curricula and techniques, and conducting meetings and training events for teaching staff). Individuals in this role had a much higher level of activity in each area than teachers and building level administrators in our sample, which would also be expected.

How Did They Feel About the Practice?

As noted in the description of the study (Crandall et al., 1982), in each school district we focused on the use of a particular practice, an "innovation" that had been adopted in at least one school in the district. It appears from the data on attitudes of our local facilitators that they were advocates of the practices being implemented. As displayed in Table 4, they reported that

the advantages of the practices far outweighed the disadvantages. Responses to questions listed in Table 5 indicate a high degree of ownership in use of the practices.

Table 4
Local Facilitator Perception of Practice's Value

Question: To what extent do you feel the advantages of using this practice outweigh disadvantages?

Response	Percent Responding*
Advantages outweigh disadvantages	89.5%
Advantages somewhat outweigh disadvantages	6.6
Advantages and disadvantages are equal	2.6
Disadvantages somewhat outweigh advantages	1.3
Disadvantages outweigh advantages	0

*The samples for these and other distributions reported in this paper are between 72 and 78, due to random missing data.

Table 5
Local Facilitators' Sense of Ownership of the Practice

Question/Response	Percent Responding
Working with the practice:	
1. solves problems I have been grappling with in schools	90.8%
2. does not really address the problems I have encountered in schools	9.2
Working with the practice:	
1. is something I am proud of	86.8
2. is part of doing my job	13.2
The attempt to carry out this practice:	
1. could have been successful without my special contribution	59.7
2. could not have been successful without my special contribution	40.3
Working with this new practice was something I:	
1. wanted to do	96.2
2. felt I had to do	3.8

What Role Did They Play in The School Improvement Effort?

We asked local facilitators to tell us how much time (relatively) they spent in a series of assistance activities involved in school improvement. These activities[3] are shown in Table 6. Note first that local facilitators were active in every one of the phases: deciding, preparing, implementing, and follow-up. In the decision-making phase, the local facilitators were most active in assessing needs and building school-level support and commitment (from both teachers and administrators). Their roles in preparation involved both arranging and actually conducting training. They spent time working closely with administrators and other site contacts. Maintaining support among school personnel in general was also part of their activities.

During implementation, local facilitators were somewhat less active than they were in earlier phases. Here they spent time across the many support and assistance activities, with a bit more attention to giving direct assistance and maintaining support in the school. They became somewhat more active in follow-up, especially in planning for continuation of the practice.

What do these data tell us? They describe individuals who "get their hands dirty," working in the school with teachers and administrators to find out what they need, get or give training, provide assistance and support after training, and help to maintain the practice. They are cheerleaders, building and maintaining commitment and spirit; they are linkers, bringing new practices and skills to teachers; and they are trouble-shooters, providing help and support where needed.

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[3]The list of activities used to collect assistance information was originally developed at the Belmont Conference on Linking Functions, Havelock (1979).

Table 6
Assistance Activities of Local Facilitators

	Responses to Amount of Time Spent (in Percent)			
	A lot of time	Moderate amount	A little time	Did not do at all
1. Assistance in deciding on new practice				
a. Seeking commitment from school administrators	15.8%	46.1%	25.0%	13.2%
b. Seeking commitment from teachers	24.7	37.7	22.1	15.6
c. Seeking support from local school boards	13.2	19.7	32.9	34.2
d. Preparing a "case" for the decision to adopt	21.1	28.9	22.4	27.6
e. Assessing needs	42.1	27.6	21.1	9.2
f. Building support among school personnel	28.6	40.3	19.5	11.7
g. Making library and computer searches for materials	10.5	10.5	32.9	46.1
2. Assistance in preparing for adoption				
a. Arranging training	33.8	41.9	14.9	9.5
b. Training users	31.9	26.4	20.8	20.8
c. Providing detailed information	29.7	33.8	25.7	10.8
d. Securing materials or other required resources	27.4	37.0	28.8	6.8
e. Working with administrators	20.5	45.2	26.0	8.2
f. Working with site contact	14.3	44.3	21.4	20.0
g. Allocating financial resources	17.6	24.3	28.4	29.7
h. Maintaining support among school personnel	23.9	42.3	26.8	7.0

Table 6 (Continued)

	Responses to Amount of Time Spent (in Percent)			
	A lot of time	Moderate amount	A little time	Did not do at all
3. Assistance in implementation				
a. Planning implementation schedules	19.7	32.9	27.6	19.7
b. Providing technical assistance or follow-up training	18.7	42.7	24.0	14.7
c. Assisting teachers in working out procedural details	23.4	29.9	28.6	18.2
d. "Putting out fires"	17.1	32.9	28.9	21.0
e. Maintaining support among school personnel	15.8	48.7	23.7	11.8
4. Follow-up activities				
a. Collecting impact data	16.2	33.8	28.4	21.6
b. Analyzing impact data	16.2	32.4	23.0	28.4
c. Assisting local site in evaluating the practice	18.9	36.5	25.7	18.9
d. Developing plan to support continuation of new practice	22.4	39.5	27.6	10.5
e. Developing additional new users at site	10.8	29.7	17.6	41.9

How Do Local Facilitators Interact With External Facilitators?

We gain additional insight into the roles and behaviors of local facilitators in the school improvement process when we compare the nature and amount of their assistance with that of the external facilitator sample. The latter were individuals from outside the local sites who were nominated by local personnel as having assisted in some phase of the school improvement effort (for a detailed description of this sample and their school improvement roles, see Cox and Havelock, 1982).

External facilitators also responded to the items reported in Table 6. It is clear from examining these data that local facilitators spend more time than external assisters on every phase of the improvement effort except "providing detailed information" and "securing materials or other required resources." This is not surprising: local facilitators were on site permanently, while most of the external assisters in our sample had many different school districts to work with. The two activities mentioned above, coupled with "training the users," formed the focus of their assistance efforts: in short, a major role of external facilitators in district change efforts was to provide expertise in a particular practice or area of education.

Even more interesting is the pattern of interaction between local and external facilitators when both of them are present in a local site; we compared sites with external/local facilitator pairs to all sites, which include many with only one kind of facilitator (either local or external).

Table 7 displays mean scores on factors of assistance compiled from the items in Table 6 for each role group. As before, the scores for external facilitator assistance are lower than those of local facilitators. Moreover, the scores of external agents on all but three types of activities are lowered further in those sites where there are external/local facilitator pairs. The opposite is true for local facilitators. Local facilitators spent more time on most activities in sites where there were external/local pairs than in all sites with local facilitators. Although the differences in the means are minute, the pattern is nonetheless suggestive. In sites where there were external/local pairs, external facilitators spent slightly more time on evaluation, continuation/diffusion, and allocation of money, while local facilitators spent a bit more time on every type of activity except supporting teachers and allocation of funds. Evaluation remained constant. Table 8 indicates these trends.

Table 8 also depicts the relative amount of time spent on each cluster of activities (read horizontally for each role group or team, 1 being least amount of time spent, 8 being most time spent.) Local facilitators spent most of their time on materials, while external facilitators' most time-consuming activity cluster was teacher adoption preparation (including training, providing information, etc.).

This adds to our picture of the constellation of players contributing to school improvement, each with their own particular brand of assistance.

Table 7

Amount of Assistance Provided by Local and External Facilitators Acting Alone or as Teams

	Initiate Awareness*	Support Teachers	Administrator Adoption Preparation	Teacher Adoption Preparation	Materials	Implementation Specifics	Evaluation	Continuation	Money	N
All local facilitators	----	6.87	7.92	5.06	3.65	4.75	4.30	2.85	1.31	75
Local facilitators with external facilitators	----	6.77	7.96	5.29	3.77	5.12	4.28	2.90	1.28	52
All external facilitators	5.50	3.31	3.91	5.16	3.22	3.89	2.25	1.23	0.60	97
External facilitators with local facilitators	5.07	2.55	3.85	5.02	3.10	3.41	2.32	1.30	0.63	48

*Local facilitators did not assist in "awareness activities" as conceptualized in the Study. See Cox and Havelock, 1982, for more detail.

Table 8

Comparison of Amounts of Assistance Provided by Local and External Facilitators Acting Alone or as Teams

	Initiate Awareness*	Support Teachers	Administrator Adoption Preparation	Teacher Adoption Preparation	Materials	Implementation Specifics	Evaluation	Continuation	Money	N
All local facilitators	----	[7]	4/5	6	8	4/5	2/3	2/3	[1]	75
Local facilitators with external facilitators	----	5	[4]	[7]	[8]	[6]	2	[3]	1	52
All external facilitators	(5.5)	(5)	(4)	(8)	(7)	(6)	3	2	1	97
External facilitators with local facilitators	5.5	2	4/5	8	7	6	(4/5)	(3)	(1)	48

[ ] = More time spent by local facilitators

( ) = More time spent by external facilitators

*Local facilitators did not assist in "awareness activities" as conceptualized in the Study. See Cox and Havelock, 1982, for more detail.

What is the Impact of Local Facilitators on the School Improvement Process?

As noted in the Crandall et al. (1982) paper, we constructed and tested two causal models to help us understand what variables influenced the outcomes of school improvement. One is individually-focused and results in outcomes at the level of individual teachers; the other is school-focused and results in outcomes at the organization level.

Figure 1 is the individually-focused model, highlighting the influence of the local facilitator on classroom change and perceived benefits of the practice. The variable called "Help From Within District but Outside the Building" describes the amount of assistance that the local facilitator reported providing to schools and teachers implementing the new practice. The model shows the effect of this help on two outcomes: (1) change in classroom teaching and, (2) the number of benefits teachers attributed to using the practice.

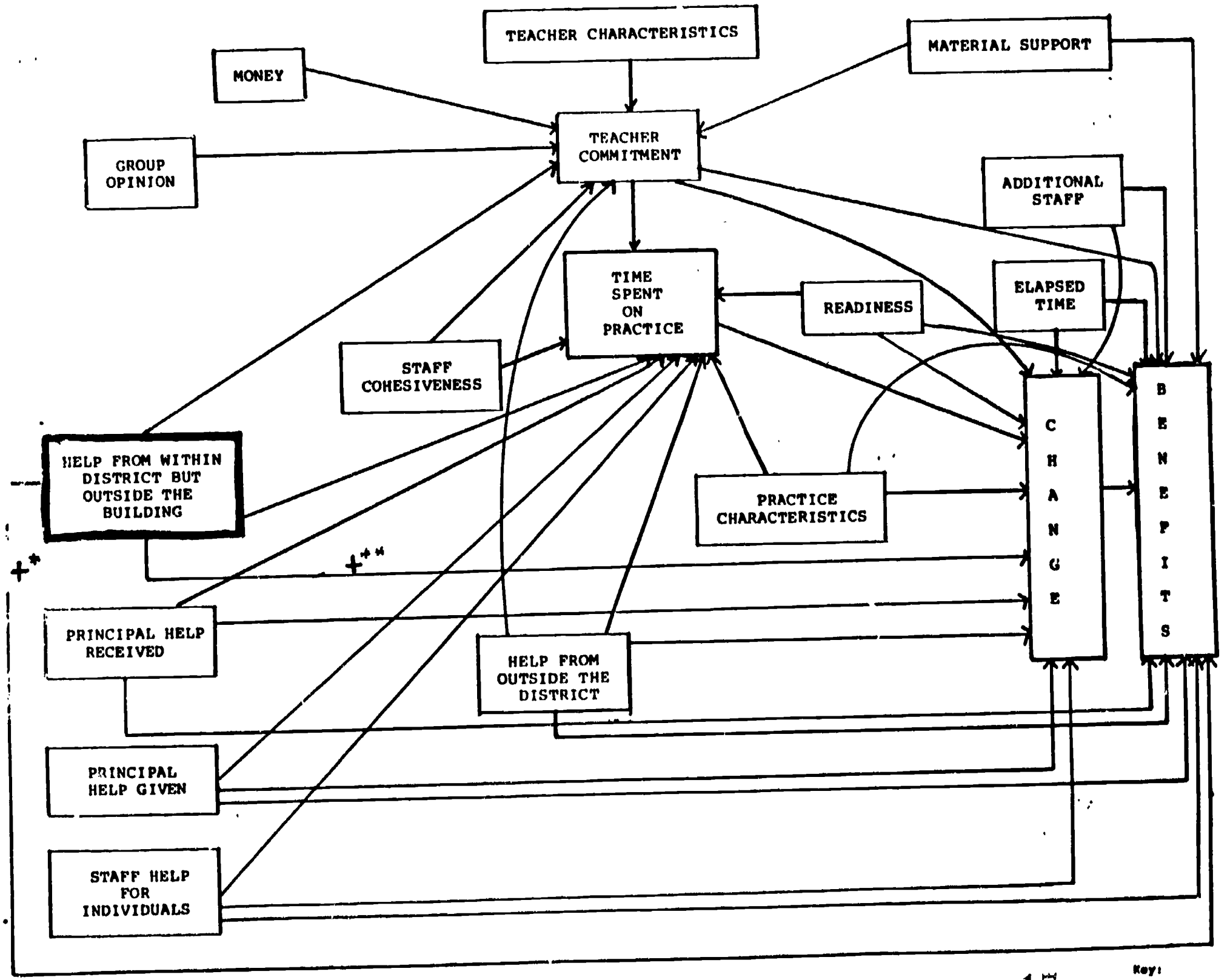
Note that help from the local facilitator has a positive influence on both outcomes. It significantly influences teachers' change in practice ($p < .05$) and it has a "borderline" significant impact ($.05 < p < .10$) on the amount of benefits attributed to use of the practice. Thus, the more help provided by persons in these roles, the more school improvement occurs. Help from the local facilitator also relates positively to teacher commitment, although this relationship is not significant.

Figures 2 and 3 depict other individually-focused models, this time resulting in outcomes related to the implementation of the practice. The outcomes are:

- fidelity, or the degree to which the practice being used replicates the components defined by the practice's developer, and
- practice-specific mastery, or the user's Level of Use (Hall, Loucks, Rutherford and Newlove, 1975) of the practice which incorporates the user's degree of sophistication, comfort, and sensitivity to student needs.

In both Figures 2 and 3, local facilitator help is positively related to the implementation outcome, but the relationship is not significant. However, a secondary analysis that differentiated kinds of facilitator assistance revealed two significant relationships with practice-specific mastery. These were for assistance with training and personal contact with administrators. It appears that the more time the local facilitator spends training or arranging for training, and the more energy he or she puts into working with administrators (presumably to get their commitment to the practice and help develop a building-level support system for its use), the more sophisticated, skillful, and "tuned into" students the users will be with the practice.

Figure 1: The Impact of Local Facilitator Assistance on Classroom Change and Perceived Benefits



Key:

* = borderline significance
** = significant

Figure 2: The Impact of Local Facilitator Assistance on Fidelity

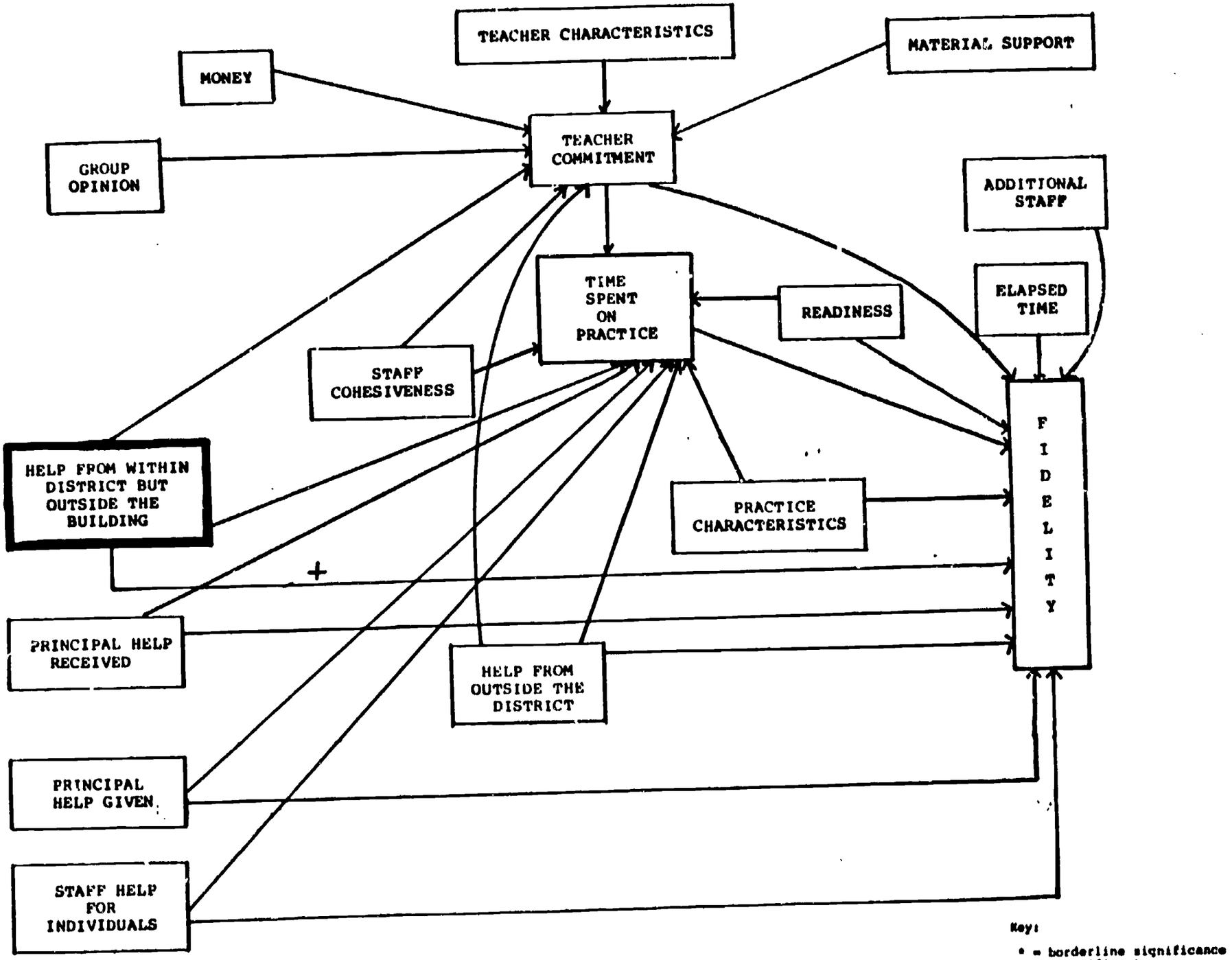
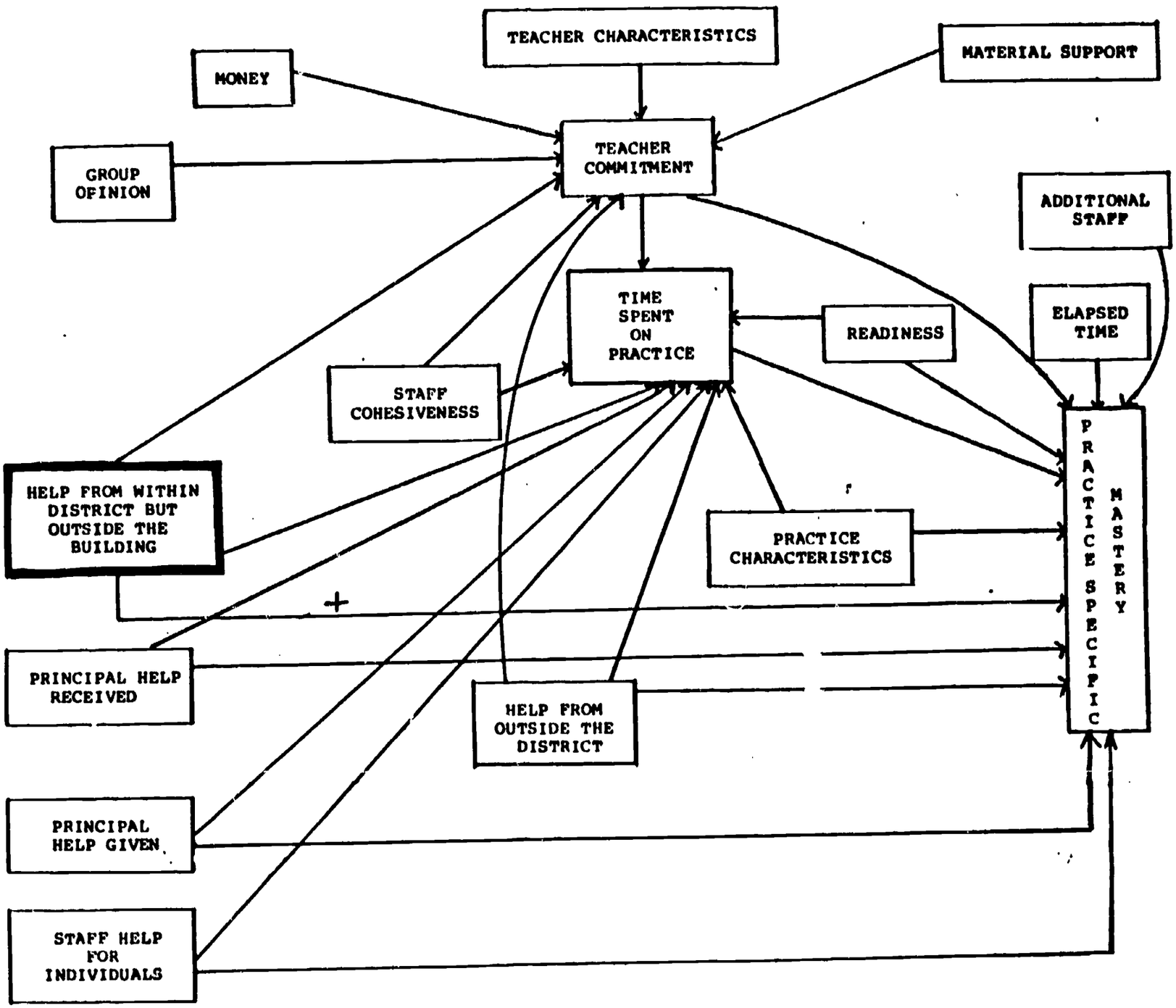


Figure 3: The Impact of Local Facilitator Assistance on Practice-Specific Mastery



Key:

* = borderline significance
** = significant

Figure 4 is the school-focused model, highlighting the "Local Facilitator Help," defined again as the amount of time spent in assisting implementation, reported by the individuals in that role. This model shows a direct and significant influence of that assistance on teacher commitment. Another relationship, this one with borderline significance, indicates that more local facilitator assistance increases the strength of teachers' feelings that the practice solved problems that they had. Note that the impact of local facilitator help is felt at the teacher level -- not the organizational level -- for example, there is no indication of influence on organizational change, institutionalization, or other school-level variables.

Summary and Implications

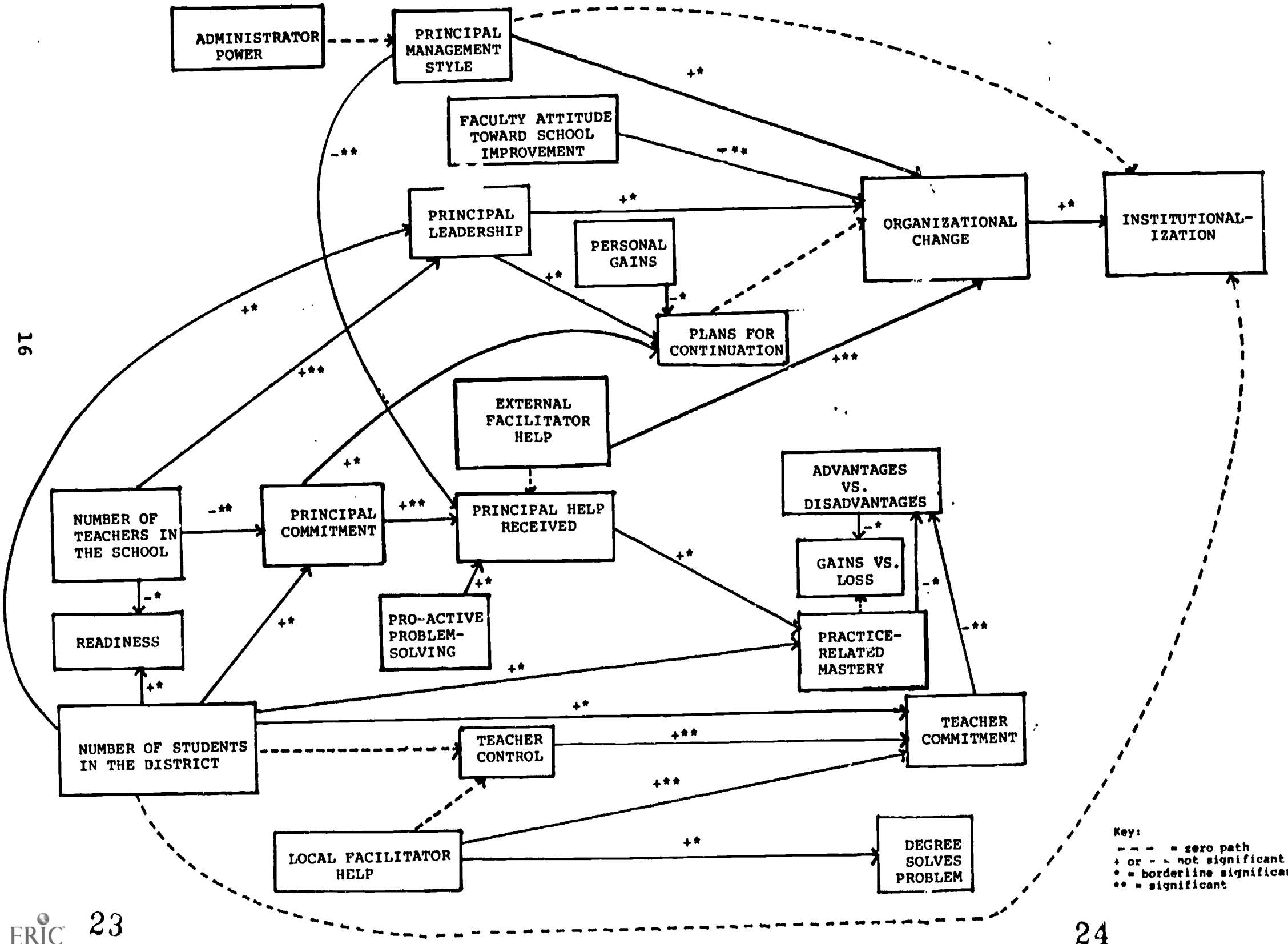
In summarizing, it is first appropriate to underscore that ours was a sample of "school improvers." We visited sites and collected data from people who were involved in implementation of new practices. So one might expect ahead of time that individuals in support roles would be both active and positive. And indeed, our sample of local facilitators are both. They are experienced, professionally involved, and have a large degree of ownership in the practices under study. They are champions and advocates of the practices, by their own admission and in the minds of their colleagues both at the building level and external to the district.

Our local facilitators played several roles: that of cheerleader, energizing support for the practice among teachers and administrators; that of trainer or linker, introducing new practices to the classroom level either personally or by bringing in "the experts;" and finally, that of troubleshooter, providing ongoing resources, support and direction after the excitement of early use had worn off.

The assistance activities of local facilitators have direct pay-off for school improvement. The more assistance, the more teachers change their classroom behaviors to approximate those required by the practice. The more assistance, the more benefits teachers report that accrue from their use of the practice: benefits to their students as well as to themselves.

One of the more interesting findings about local facilitator assistance relates to its influence on teacher commitment. Recall that in the individually-focused models we found that teacher commitment was a strong predictor of the amount of class time teachers spent on the practice, which in turn was a strong predictor of the amount of change that occurred -- a very clear, neat link that is not totally unexpected. What we couldn't find were predictors for teacher commitment; what contributes to this particularly important variable remained a mystery. Furthermore, that was in the model for the group requiring the most amount of change for practice use to occur. In the model for the other group -- that requiring little change in prior behaviors to be considered users of the practice -- teacher commitment was found

Figure 4: The Role of the Local Facilitator Assistance in the School-Focused Model



to be a strong, and this time direct predictor of both teacher change and benefits of the practice. Again, we found no predictors for teacher commitment.

Now in the school-focused model we see the local facilitator emerging as a likely influence on teacher commitment. Here we have an individual who takes on the specific role of "drumming up" commitment and support -- as well as other roles -- and succeeds in making a real contribution to school improvement. Unlike other variables we have focused on, this occurs both with individuals requiring major change in practice, as well as those where a minor change is in order for practice implementation to occur.

It is heartening to find an impact made on school improvement that comes from a source that can be influenced. A local facilitator can be designated, or even hired, to work on an improvement effort. One who is already exploring and supporting a new practice can be supported by administrators, at both district and building levels. He or she can then be encouraged to take on the roles we have found to be most useful: the "in the trenches" assistance tasks of assessing needs, developing school level support and commitment, providing training and the all-important follow-up. Unlike variables like size of district (which is impossible to influence, except through screening) and principal leadership style (which is easier to influence, but requires much time, resources, and politics with uncertain outcomes), local facilitator assistance can be applied to a school improvement effort without much more than a few extra dollars and/or some rearrangement in staff assignments.

The role of the local facilitator is an important one. Still, many questions about these individuals remain unanswered: Are they born or made? Can they be as successful assisting in a mandated effort as in an effort of their own creation? How do they maintain their success with practices of varying complexities and scopes, and with other players (e.g., principals, external facilitators) taking on a wide variety of roles? What do they actually do to stimulate, encourage, and secure teacher and principal commitment to a school improvement effort? As a result of our study, the first steps are taken; the exploration has begun into a promising and intriguing facet of the school improvement process.

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