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ABSTRACT

For over a decade, parents whose children are in the public education system have expressed concerns regarding the quality of teaching in their schools; yet little energy and study have been devoted to the topic of incompetent or marginal teacher improvement. To describe how marginal teachers perceived their improvement to be related to a staff development program, 6 marginal teachers were selected from a pool of 17 participants in a Stallings Effective Use of Time Program workshop. Profiles on each of the participants' teaching skills were constructed based on classroom observations completed in December 1987. The teachers, all from three rural northern Vermont schools, then participated in five workshops. The teachers were reobserved and a second profile was generated. In a sixth workshop, participants compared both profiles and noted improvements. Finally, interviews designed to elicit examples and illustrations of influences were conducted. The results indicate that: (1) knowledge of specific behaviors had a strong influence on the teachers' perceived improvements; and (2) topics of the workshops, the relationship with the trainer, and small group size were strongly related to perceived gains. These results show that data-based staff development programs can succeed, especially with marginal teachers untrained in the basics of their profession. (11 references) (KM)

# MARGINAL TEACHERS:
# THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF IMPROVEMENT

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For over a decade public school parents have expressed concerns about the quality of teaching in their schools. At one point, 45% of parents participating in the annual Gallup Poll indicated they believed some teacher(s) should be fired. Surveys of school administrators identify poor teaching as a serious problem in schools. Estimates of incompetent teachers range from 5-15% (Clear & Box, 1985).

Steinmetz (1969) has attributed poor performance to problems within organizations, difficulties employees have on the job, or influences outside the job. Although causes of poor performance in classrooms have been described, categorized, and from time-to-time withstood judicial review, they have been infrequently used in dismissal cases. In a review of literature related to teacher failure, Bridges (1984) has cited lack of discipline as the main reason offered for teacher dismissal. Principals in Idaho, surveyed as to reasons for probation or nonrenewal of teachers, noted serious deficiencies in behavior management, student motivation, communication, and planning (Lerch, 1986). The Michigan Court of Appeals (Bryant, 1986) included these areas as considerations in dismissal cases:

1) knowledge of subject
2) delivery of content
3) behavior management
4) ability to get along with colleagues and parents
5) ability to handle stress related to teaching

Literature on instructional leadership and supervision has documented that the focus of most principals' working days are management activities unrelated to curriculum and instruction, despite expressions of interest in working with teachers. A typical principal divides his/her attention among these functions: student discipline, facilities, budget development, school-community relations, curriculum development, personnel management and evaluation. For most principals, Hallinger (1985) has observed that the area receiving the least attention is supervision of instruction. Bridges (1984) also noted the increased influence of teacher unions, who have advocated for equal distributions of salary and have disputed merit pay and other kinds of incentives. These factors, and less funding of inservice, have diminished the strength of the principal's supervisory role.

In addition, a variety of circumstances have contributed to avoidance of honest and thorough evaluations of teaching performance by principals and other supervisory personnel. Concerns for objectivity, accuracy, consistency in measurement of teaching performance, and poorly constructed evaluation programs have caused principals or supervisors to withdraw from an active role in teacher evaluation. Few states have defined minimal competence for teacher performance (Clear & Box, 1985; Bridges,

1984). The attitude of some school administrators engaged in supervision and evaluation has been described as one of "benign neglect...why do much about what we don't know much about" (Manatt, 1983).

The prospect of conducting evaluations, helping poor performers increase their skills, or following through on rigorous bureaucratic requirements to document dismissal has dismayed many educators who evaluate teachers. Conferencing and assisting an unsuccessful employee is not an easy task, one which many administrators would like to avoid. Fear of creating morale problems by focusing administrative attention on poor performance has been cited as another factor leading to avoidance of dealing with low quality teaching. Lack of time and money have also been noted. In courts and at hearings, the burden of proof of incompetent teaching rests with the school district. Collecting data systematically is time consuming and difficult. Either nonpursuit or inadequate documentation has resulted in few dismissals of tenured teachers. Bridges (1984), however, has noted that over 70% of the teachers involved in hearings do leave their positions, despite the outcomes of their cases.

Ambiguous standards, lack of time, intensity of effort and desire to avoid controversy result in most teachers receiving average or above average ratings on general checklists. Schools

have been described as risk averse (Bryant, 1986). Rather than seeking improvement and future benefit (i.e., by removing a teacher who is performing below standards), educators often prefer avoiding immediate conflict. Yet, by not taking action, schools, and particularly those in leadership roles, appear incompetent themselves. Frequently, initiation of evaluation procedures is caused by parents who complain about suspected inadequate teachers, rather than personnel trained in supervision and evaluation.

In an encounter with a poor performing teacher, school districts face several alternatives: do nothing, offer money to exit position, offer opportunity to improve, or legally fire. Bridges (1984) has described remediation of teaching performance as an "intellectual Sahara of voluminous literature on teacher evaluation and dismissal." Little energy and study have been devoted to the topic of improvement of incompetent or marginal teachers. This study describes reasons a group of marginal teachers perceived their improvement to be related to a staff development program.

## Method

### Subjects

Six teachers and three supervisors who were participating in the first year of a Vermont state-wide implementation of the Stallings Effective Use of Time Program were participants in this study. The teachers were selected from a pool of seventeen

workshop participants because of their low scores in classroom time devoted to academic statements and significant amount of time devoted to organizing and off task behavior on an initial series of observations as measured by the Stallings Observation System.

The teachers had teaching experience ranging from 1-11 years; three were in their first year, although one had been an aide for three years at the same school. Of the first year teachers, one taught first grade, and two were in grades 7-8, teaching reading and special education, respectively. The experienced group included junior high living arts, senior high math, and a 4-6 grade combination teacher. The supervisors included two K-12 coordinators of special education and Chapter 1 and a high school curriculum director. Participants were from three school sites -- one elementary and two junior-senior high schools -- in rural areas in northern Vermont.

Instrument

The Stallings Observation System (SOS) has two main sections: 1) Classroom Snapshot, which allows a certified classroom observer to code the kinds of activities and materials with which the teacher and student are involved, 2) the Five Minute Interaction captures interactions between teacher and students. The purpose of this low inference tool is to collect data on interactive and noninteractive teaching and student involvement. The SOS has been used in observation studies since the early 1970's. John Goodlad (1985) used a modified version of this observation tool to collect data in his study of high schools.

Procedures in the Effective Use of Time Program

The Effective Use of Time (EUOT) Program, developed by Dr. Jane Stallings and associates, has been recognized by the Joint Dissemination Review Panel for national dissemination in 1980. Listed among programs funded by the National Diffusion Network, EUOT has been adopted in 15 states by both rural and urban schools (Stallings, 1983).

Teachers are observed on three consecutive days for 40-50 minute time periods by a certified observer who, during a seven day training program, has demonstrated proficiency and reliability in use of a low inference observation tool, the Stallings Observation System (SOS). The observation data is cast into an individual profile which describes kinds of interactions, behaviors and activities of both teachers and students for each teacher. The profile presents recommended percentages of time allotments for classroom behaviors and activities; with the guidance of a trained workshop leader, teachers examine their performance in light of the recommendations and the context of their classroom. A series of five workshops on research on effective teaching, classroom management, behavior management, interactive teaching, and cognitive strategies: reading. During these workshops, teachers review profiles, make commitments to improve in certain areas or try new strategies, observe each other, and discuss classroom problems with an eye to increasing student learning opportunities.

Descriptions and exercises in the workshop manual are based on effective teaching studies, time-on-task findings and applications from previous program participants. After the fifth workshop, the trained observer collects data on participating teachers, and in a final session, teachers review their preliminary profile and compare it with a final profile to analyze whether they made growth in classroom behaviors they worked on during the program.

In order to become trained to deliver the EUOT Program, educators study under a certified trainer. Mastering both a complex observation tool and the content and process of leading the workshops through approximately three weeks of intensive training and demonstrations of successful performance, they can become certified trainers.

Procedures in this Study

During the first year of Vermont state-wide trainings in the Stallings Effective Use of Time Program, the researcher collected field notes on workshop participant reaction and progress from the supervisors who were training to be certified observers and workshop leaders in the Stallings Program. This model required that participants engage in twelve days of intensive training over the course of a year to become reliable observers using the SOS and demonstrate facility with the workshop materials and processes. Trainees observed a certified trainer lead an individual workshop, discussed content and process, then they conducted the same workshop with a group of teachers whom they had recruited in their

district. After each of their sessions, they returned to their training group to discuss their work and become familiar with the next workshop.

In December 1987, teacher workshop participants were observed. The profiles were reviewed and some teachers were found to have low scores on a number of important variables. From February to May, a certified trainer modeled five workshops, and trainers then conducted these workshops at their site. Following the fifth workshop, the teachers were reobserved and a second profile was generated. In a sixth workshop, participants compared profiles and noted improvements and future needed growth.

Teachers selected to be in this study and defined as marginal teachers, had lower than 70% of their time spent on academic statements and had high percentages of time in organizing and off-task behavior in the initial observations. They also made gains in these behaviors in the final set of observations. All agreed to participate in the study.

An attitude scale, designed to measure strength of potential influences to change, captured participant reactions to a series of program and non-program related variables.

Interviews designed to elicit examples and illustrations of influences were conducted. Both supervisors and participants participated in interviews approximately one hour in length. All interviews were taped with respondents' permission.

Over ten hours of tape were transcribed and analyzed for

common themes, differences, and descriptions of level and kind of influences. Quotations representative of feelings held in common and of unique attitudes held by teachers were selected to describe perceptions of influences on their improvements.

## Results

### Perceptions of Influences as Measured by Attitude Scale

Table 1 reflects the proportion of participants perceiving factors related to classroom observation as having influenced their teaching behaviors.

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Insert Table 1 About Here

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All participants rated knowledge of the specific behaviors being coded by the observer on the second series of three classroom visits as having a strong influence on gains made. Being observed by someone was also ranked as having a moderately strong influence by 66% (n=6) of teachers. Peer observation, however, was viewed as having a neutral or weak impact on improvement by 67% of the respondents and a strong impact by only 33% of the participants. Coaching students to behave appropriately on days of observation was rated as a weak influence by all.

Table 2 displays teacher ratings of factors directly related to the

workshop series which teachers perceived as having influenced their improvement in teaching behavior or not.

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Insert Table 2 About Here

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Main factors perceived to be strongly related to participant improvements included the topics of the workshops, relationship with the trainer, small size of group, one's own public commitments, hearing the commitments of other teachers, and teacher reports of strategies. The profiles, reading workshop materials, having a group member from the building, subject area, or grade level were rated as having moderate influence. Factors, such as additional materials, location, refreshments, were regarded as having little influence on participant improvement.

Table 3 examines strength of participant responses to outside influences that may have been factors in their changes.

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Insert Table 3 About Here

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Building climate was rated as a strong factor by most participants. Discussions with other teachers and the trainer outside the workshop setting, as well as support from the principal, were viewed as having moderate influence. Both support

from principal and superintendent were rated highly by two teachers and low by two others, suggesting strong influence for some teachers and little or none for others. Family or significant others were perceived as having little impact on participant growth in teaching.

Results from interviews of teachers and supervisors will be grouped under two headings: program-related factors (including observation, the profile, relationships with trainer, training, and logistics), and non-program related factors (school and support/events outside the program).

## Perceptions of Influences Described in Interviews: Program-related Variables

### Observation

A series of interview questions related to the effects of different kinds of observation strategies employed in the Effective Use of Time Program. Teachers rated knowing that someone was coming to observe them as an important factor in their improvement. For the first set of observations, teachers believed they did not alter the way they taught their classes. In fact, three participants indicated they had selected classes with whom they were experiencing difficulty. "I had real complaints about this class and their outrageous behavior. I wanted her to see what I was up against," offered one teacher. A second participant

selected her multi-grade math class for review because, "I knew the class wasn't working." Another expressed the desire for an "honest picture." Four of the teachers had been observed by the trainer prior to participation in the program and noted that this prior experience lessened nervousness during these observations. First year teachers rated knowing an observer was going to be in their classroom as a slightly higher influence on their improvement than experienced teachers did. "I was really curious about how I was going to do."

All participants indicated that knowing the teaching behaviors being coded by the observer for the second set of observations was a strong factor in their improvement. They made an effort to follow suggestions discussed in the workshops because they had tried the behaviors and they had been successful in a variety of strategies, e.g., gaining student involvement, reducing wasted time, increasing questioning and trying more small group work. One teacher reasoned, "I'll be evaluated on what do; if it's good - fine. If not, then I need suggestions. The second observations were not as important as what I wanted to do in the classroom." A contrasting view was presented by one teacher who remembered, "On one day I felt I was doing the lesson because she (the observer) was there, and I felt like I was on eggshells. Doing verbal activities with this group (special education students) was dangerous, but then doing just pencil and paper activities did get boring."

Most teachers saw peer observation as having little influence on the changes they made. One teacher, in special education, was interested in seeing her students function in a larger class, but did not rate the experience as impacting strongly on her own improvement. In terms of "managing large classes similar to mine" observing others helped "after we talked about the observation," noted an experienced person. While unsure of the influence on her change, another participant enjoyed the peer observations. A beginning teacher believed that one of her peer observations could have been more formal and useful. When she observed another group member, however, that teacher commented on the comprehensiveness of her data. "She said she learned a lot from my information." One teacher reacted very positively to her peer observation experiences. "I'd love to take a week and see different subject teachers -- chemistry, physical education, etc. -- or go visit classes one period/week as a learning experience. I observed three teachers during the program who had experience. It was excellent to see a teacher who asks good questions and involves all his students. These are not something someone knows how to do instinctively. It's useful to have a model." Trainers, too, believed peer observations had value because teachers had a genuine desire to help each other. The data collected from the peer observation was left with the observed teacher who analyzed the data and felt ownership.

Although they announced observer visits and during the program occasionally explained the techniques they were trying to do with their students, five of six teachers stated they did not coach their students on appropriate behavior for the observations. One first year teacher indicated that she had advised her students one morning before her second set of observations that the observer would be "looking at whether they were working and listening or not." Two other teachers believed that their students were "uncoachable." A fourth teacher maintained, "I wanted my class to be business as usual, so I could get realistic feedback on what I do. Creating an ideal teaching situation defeats the purpose of being observed."

The Profile

Reactions to the profile were not neutral. A veteran teacher's immediate reaction was, "Why am I teaching? I'm so bad; I shouldn't be in the classroom. Some of the data I agreed with, but having it slapped in my face was a shock." A first year participant echoed her concern, "I was depressed -- maybe I'm not a good teacher." The gap between classroom score and profile recommendations discouraged a third teacher at first; however, her trainer's attitude was not disparaging or critical, but helpful. Using the profile as a statement of where the group currently stood, the trainer focused on the group's future attainment. "I can remember her saying, 'This profile is where we are; nobody's a perfect teacher. You'll do better, and this workshop will help you

improve.'"

Trainers reported participants' first reactions to the profile as intense; responses varied from initial silence, dismay, surprise and even, "I think she (teacher participant) was devastated by the profile." New teachers were overwhelmed that there were so many components to the teaching process. The computer printouts confirmed teachers' suspicions about their own teaching and gave direction to their improvements. One trainer summarized the power of the profile, "Teachers, in general, have nagging doubts about their own capability and there they were in black and white. A lot of schools don't do much evaluation, so many teachers have no feedback. No one has shown some of the weak teachers how bad they are."

One experienced teacher noted that it was difficult not to be defensive about these results. "I didn't want to be seen this way." The atmosphere -- the smallness and closeness of the group -- enabled participants to feel safe as they expressed their concerns. "Someone in the workshop would exclaim, 'Look what I got!'" " Shortly, another group member would return, 'Oh, I did too.'" Getting an overall picture of the profile and its application in one's own classroom was an important task in the first workshop. Initially, one teacher reported, some of the group tended to fixate on each detail rather than focusing on strengths and needs. As the groups discussed their data, descriptions and understandings of their classroom workings began to emerge. Two teachers reflected on their recent student teaching experiences.

One noted that her cooperating teacher corrected all stucent papers during class time and took care of other personal matters, while the children were working. "I thought this was okay, but I don't feel that way anymore. I participate with my class as much as possible."

One group had a participant who, after reviewing his profile and the workshop manual, left his position in January. In a discussion with the trainer, he stated that he was surprised at the demanding nature of teaching. For the other marginal teachers in this study the profile served as a motivator and challenge to make their teaching better. "Seeing the profile, I wanted to change." They ranked the profile as having a moderate to high impact on their improvement. As an experienced teacher noted, "Constructive criticism and a pat on the back are needed in any job. The data made me realize how much had to be changed." Reflections on the profile provoked the group discussions and self analysis among the teachers that led to improvements in their teaching.

Relationships with trainer

A study of trainer role group (Stringfield, Schaffer & Devlin-Scherer, 1986) has suggested that the educational position of the trainer (principal, teacher, or university person) who leads the workshops in the EUOT program is not an important factor in facilitating teacher change. Marginal teachers in the present study expressed strongly positive feelings for their program trainers who were supervisors. These teachers believed the ways

trainers related to them in and out of workshops during the program had been a strong, contributing influence on their growth in teaching. Four of the participants spoke of having worked with the trainer in a supervisory relationship in the previous year and two teachers had known their trainers for longer time periods. "Thinking of her as fellow-worker, curriculum director, and friend, I wanted to improve." Having known the trainer prior to the program seemed to heighten this teacher's desire to grow. Not knowing the trainer, however, proved to be no block to teachers' change. How trainers behaved with teachers in the program seemed more powerful in effecting change than their role. The workshops were described as a "forums for discussion." The trainer "did not come across as an authority, although she made definite and helpful suggestions." Trainer concern, receptivity, and non-threatening manner were qualities cited as facilitative of the group process and individual improvement. The non-judgmental attitude served trainers well. Participants noted they were willing to take risks and experiment because of it. "I would pass her in the halls and she would ask, 'How's it going?'; not in a 'have-you-fixed-it-all attitude, but in an encouraging, supportive way." After reviewing her profile in the first workshop, a teacher sought out the trainer, whom she found "comforting." The trainer helped her deal with these negative results with a positive perspective.

The inspiration an admired and competent mentor can provide for even an experienced teacher is revealed in this

statement:

> I have had the good fortune to have someone evaluating me whom I could consider my teacher -- someone I could learn from. Last year we talked about how I had the capability to be a really good teacher, but had not challenged myself to do that. I knew she expected a lot, and I was in a position to learn. This year I could have gone through the same program with a different instructor, and it would not have been as beneficial. Her honesty, high expectations, feedback and encouragement -- all were important to my improvement.

Trainers noted the ability to relate to people as a major characteristic helpful for a workshop leader. Courage and enthusiasm were discussed as qualities contributing to trainer success. As a trainer, one noted, "You have to believe this program is effective and worthwhile. If you lead half-heartedly teachers won't buy into it."

The Training

Topics of the workshop sessions were rated as strong influences on these teachers' improved skills in their classrooms. Classroom management, behavior management, and interactive instruction were viewed as the most helpful in making changes in teaching behavior. The final workshop on cognitive strategies was interesting to the reading teacher, but others found it too "academic" or abstract. Three participants stated that the research on effective teaching was interesting. "Reading and discussing effective teaching behaviors was helpful to understand

what we were looking for," while one teacher noted she had this information before in college. One trainer commented, "Only one person in my group had any concept of effective teaching. We were starting at rock bottom; they have made great strides but still have a long way to go. I can't believe you have to wait until you are in a classroom to find out about these techniques. At that point you should be perfecting them, not hearing about these strategies for the first time."

Materials were described as having strong influence for two teachers. "That heavy book was easy to read, specific and helpful. It had a lot of impact because it described what we're looking for," a beginning teacher stated. For a veteran teacher using the manual also appeared to have an important influence on her teaching. It was useful for her as she reviewed her teaching. "I'd think, I used to do that; why am I not doing it now? Guess I got stale. Putting those good ideas in a notebook made it easy." Three participants liked the exercises. One teacher wished for more examples relating to mathematics and science. Overall, for four teachers, the manual was viewed as having some influence. Additional materials, brought in by the trainer were viewed similarly. Only one teacher noted that another participant brought in a reading. Discussing the readings was viewed as more helpful than the reading itself.

Composition of the groups varied, including an elementary (two members), secondary (four teachers in fields of science,

health, and driver education) combination, a junior high school group (four teachers from grades 7-8 in English, reading, social studies, and special education) and a junior-senior high school group (eight members, including fields of living arts, mathematics, foreign language, fine arts, English, science). It was important to four participants to get beyond one's own department or field to gain perspective on what was going on in the building, see problems in common, and expand one's ideas and philosophy about teaching. Elementary and secondary teachers grew to understand each other's roles better in a mixed group, according to two participants and trainer. In the junior high group, having members who all taught grades 7-8 was seen as extremely helpful. "It would have been like apples and oranges to have high school teachers in our group," thought one participant. One dissenting vote regarding composition was registered by the special educator who saw her program as unique from regular education. Other teachers, however, were pleased with their groups' composition even though membership varied. Ratings from the attitude scale indicated that participants felt having a teacher or teachers from their buildings or subject areas or grade levels were helpful in their improvement. The interviews suggested that composition was not as important as the process of the group.

Size of group was strongly rated as a factor in improvement. Teachers appreciated having enough "airtime." Having regular opportunities to share created intimacy among group

members. Teachers commented that they had a sense that the group would care and would listen to their concerns and thoughts.

Reporting strategies that worked and did not work also drew positive ratings and was enabled by the group size. For novice teachers, listening to voices of experience proved beneficial. "I found it very revealing that experienced teachers of many years still had some of the same problems. I began to realize that even good teachers can have bad days." The openness of the veteran teachers demonstrated the need to continue to improve and meet challenges throughout one's career. "Now I see that you don't just become a teacher and do it twenty years; you have to continue to work on your skill."

For the beginning teacher, in particular, descriptions of what and how techniques worked was a significant activity. Concrete suggestions offered were helpful. Talking brought out ideas. "The group was responsive. If something went well, it was received enthusiastically." Having a core group was valued. Trainers viewed the discussion with peers as having the single greatest impact on improvement for these teachers. A "program with peers is non-threatening and encourages self improvement." Teachers gained strength from "sharing professionally, played off one another's minds, and collectively arrived at useful ideas." They found as a group they had wisdom and they developed respect for each other and themselves. Even teachers whose fields are sometimes taken less seriously by mainstream academics -- living

arts, special education, primary vs. secondary -- found themselves actively contributing and valued members. The structure of the group and its size enabled them to see themselves in both vulnerable and strong situations. A bond grew among group members that helped them express themselves on both personal and professional levels. Teachers attended sessions regularly, even though getting to the workshops involved great effort for some.

Commitments from teachers to work on trying new strategies are sought weekly in the Effective Use of Time Program (Devlin-Scherer, Devlin-Scherer, Schaffer & Stringfield, 1985). Trainers believed that making and sharing in other teachers' commitments was a valuable technique that aided teachers in formulating and maintaining significant changes in their classrooms. "It's easy to rationalize that you'll try something next week, because teachers are busy," observed one trainer. Participants also saw value in generating their own commitments and hearing others. A new teacher exclaimed, "It's a huge thing to become a better teacher. Focusing on a strategy -- working on a component, one specific behavior, rather than the concept of organizing time was very helpful." A trainer described some participants' surprise when she opened the second workshop by stating individual commitments from the previous week and asking each participant 'how it went,' but they were all ready after that. "Most weeks teachers really followed through," noted a participant. All participants noted benefits as getting to apply ideas and the awareness that everyone needed to make changes. "Seeing a veteran teacher, who is known as one of the

best teachers in the building, say, 'I need to try to do this more,' was inspiring." Hearing others' commitments "set a standard" and the process "snowballed in a positive way and people were more willing to keep trying to improve -- to find additional techniques to try." Not all participants viewed making commitments with enthusiasm. "Thinking up what to do was a pain," noted one veteran teacher, "but it usually helped us." In describing the value of this process, a teacher concluded that participating in commitments "enabled us to take our work seriously. It caused us to become introspective about our own teaching." A trusting relationship among group members and trainer facilitated this process.

Logistics, including location, refreshments, and time, were not seen by participants as having impact on their growth. "The trainer was the best person to be with in that hot room until we moved," explained a participant; "she could keep us awake and interested." All appreciated the food. Workshops were conducted from 3:15-6:15 p.m. at all sites. One participant stated she didn't care for released time - "I like to be in my room," so afternoons were the best time. Others noted it would have been worse to return in the evening. "What time is good for teachers?" one responded. Afternoons were an acceptable time for group members. Consensus was that what happened was more important than where or when.

In the interviews, program-related variables that teachers

viewed as strongly influencing their improvement in teaching included: small group size, observation (knowledge of behaviors being coded and that someone was going to observe), peer discussion (teacher reports of successes and failures, commitments stated and shared) and topics of the workshops. The profiles, reading workshop materials, and colleagues from building, subject or grade level involved in the workshop were viewed as somewhat strong influences on teacher changes. Less influential were peer observation and additional materials.

In the next section, school factors and support/events outside the EUOT program that may have influenced teacher changes in their classroom will be discussed.

## Perceptions of Influences Described in Interviews: Non-program Related Factors

### School Factors

Participants were asked to describe any changes in rooms, scheduling, students, time of the year, curriculum topic or subjects taught, new colleagues, and the possible impact of such changes on their teaching performance. The first year teachers did note some changes but felt these events had little impact on their performance. The special educator indicated she did feel slightly more comfortable with her class in May than December, had a new aide, and one student in her observed class faced a difficult

situation near the end of the program resulting in some inattention and misbehavior, but felt none of these differences contributed positively or negatively to her achievement. According to the reading teacher, implementing active instruction accounted for the change in her class; nothing else changed. For the primary teacher, school factors remained similar, but she did feel slightly more experienced in her role. She believed the program had helped her attain this sense of control and added to her teaching skills.

Two of the experienced teachers had different groups of students observed in the second set of observations because of schedule changes; students were described as similar in ability and behavior. Trainers confirmed these descriptions.

Support/events outside program

Two teachers were going through divorces, but this event did not hinder their progress. "Some people get depressed, but I got on a self improvement jag -- maybe I thrive on stress," confided one.

Inservice days were not viewed as helpful to any improvement teachers made during the program. "Inservice seems removed from the classroom. I don't get the sense I can take these ideas back and use them. I really got that feeling from each workshop, however. Even at night I was excited to go back to school the next day and try out the things I had learned." One teacher was taking a reality therapy course during the program and discussed differences she saw between the two programs. She had

decided to use reality therapy more in her role as a teacher advisor. A second teacher took a graduate course, Patterns of Thinking, and thought her questioning gain may have been due to participation in both programs.

Participants examined level and kind of support outside the workshop sessions for potential influences and looked at school climate, discussions with trainer or teachers outside the workshop setting, additional materials, support from principal, superintendent, or family/significant other.

Of these, school climate was perceived as the strongest factor. Teachers at one site spoke highly of principal and colleagues; at another school, the open structure and interchange among teachers were valued; at the third, the trainer and an older teacher were valued advisors. All three schools were undergoing or underwent a change in administrators by the end of the year; yet, in only two cases did teacher participants express concern. They noted that their two schools had been without discipline and administrative support for the entire year. Teacher perceptions of climate must have related more to satisfaction with staff than administration. Informal discussions with trainers and teachers between workshop sessions occurred and were appreciated. One trainer did additional observations to support her group. Three participants spoke regularly with their department chair or a colleague about their work in the program.

Principals' perceived support ranged from little to high.

One participant spoke about the assistant principal granting the group permission to try a check system for discipline which had been in conflict with the current school philosophy. Two participants indicated their principal conferenced with them about their efforts. She also observed and noticed the behaviors they were trying. The third principal was new to his role, but was seen by one participant as enthusiastic and interested in professional development.

One superintendent sent a letter welcoming teachers to the training. He also came to the final session of the workshops and discussed the program with the teachers. "I felt as though it was a credible program and that he believed in its value too." The other superintendents granted recertification credit, so teachers concluded that they must have been aware of the program. Teacher participants appreciated the attention of the administrators when it occurred. Little impact or influence on their changes was noted because of this attention.

Support from home ranged from none to some on the attitude scale and the interviews explained the ratings. "I talk to my husband all the time, but he doesn't understand what I do." In contrast, one new teacher whose husband had been just retired from education said he let me "tell the whole story and contributed ideas." Taking this course, and having children in daycare and school, meant one teacher had to rely on a new relationship to pick up and care for the children. Sometimes there was tension about

the course. Another participant observed that her husband did not have the same emotional attachment to his work that she did. "Teaching is my life and Stallings became part of my growth as a teacher. When I described the significance of the workshops and experiences to my mother, who is also a teacher, in May in his presence, it was a revelation to him."

In non-program-related factors, school climate and discussions outside the training with trainer and teachers were perceived as contributing factors to participants' growth in teaching. Little support from school administration was described and was perceived as having little impact for most teachers. Family helped with dinner and daycare, but their assistance was not viewed as having much influence on teaching improvements.

## Discussion

### Perceptions of Main Influences on Marginal Teacher Performance

When asked to identify main influences on their marked improvements in teaching behavior, participants were explicit in their descriptions. Throughout the interviews, all teachers commented on the benefits of examining, discussing and reflecting specifically on their teaching behaviors in their classrooms. As one new teacher indicated, her improvement was most enhanced by, "getting supportive feedback directly related to what I was doing

in the classroom." Despite the fact that job-embedded inservice has been discussed in the literature for some time, participants in this study had not directly benefited in their staff development programs.

Support from the group and the trainer also were viewed as contributing in a major way to participant growth in teaching. "Being the new kid on the block, having a supportive group who were all trying to improve, made me feel better. The workshops focused me on the professionalism of teaching and the importance of what I was doing."

Participants did not highlight peer observation as a strong factor influencing their improvement. Their perception is not in line with the findings of Mohlman-Sparks (1986) regarding peer coaching. This disparity may suggest a problem in implementation of peer coaching in the groups in this study, limitations of perceptions as evidence, or a need to re-examine the issue of peer coaching.

Although not perceived as strongly influencing their improvement by these teachers when they rated program-related and nonprogram-related influences on the attitude scale, comments during the interview indicated that the profile may have been a more powerful determinant in teachers' behavioral change than they realized. A new teacher indicated, "The profile -- seeing it on paper did bother me. I made an appointment to talk with the trainer about it after the first workshop. Having specific

behaviors to work for each week helped me set manageable goals." In the interviews, extensive discussion and intense language was used to desc.ibe the profile and their reactions on receiving it. Retrospectively, their discussions of what they worked on during the program were specific and related to needs shown on their individual profiles. The profile, however, may not be as effective by itself. Analysis of one's work and the opportunity to evaluate teaching strategies in a group setting were perceived by these teachers as strong factors in inviting changed behavior. Also, it is possible the participants would value people over paper. A veteran teacher noted, "When I first looked at the profile I saw some things I wasn't doing as well as I had thought. If I was going to stay in the teaching business, I needed to do something. With the help of the profile, the trainer and some folks in the workshop. I got better. I want to be a good teacher."

The importance of one's own motivation to improve, even after the challenge of viewing a profile of one's work and evaluating one's teaching publicly, cannot be dismissed as a factor in teacher growth. "My improvement is due to my desire to improve and being at a place in my life where I wanted to move upward. Having a strong person (the trainer), whom I respect, support me and say that I could be a wonderful teacher was a factor."

In their final summaries, these marginal teachers identified the job specific training, support from trainer and group, and discussing their work with other teachers as important

factors which appeared to influence their improvements.

## Conclusions

Recently researchers have questioned the value or efficacy of applications of time-on-task findings in staff development. Criticisms have been reflective of the need for educators to move beyond a generalized view of teaching behaviors applicable across grade levels and field to models which are subject and grade level specific.

These investigations, which promise to offer much to the study of teaching and contribute to the improvement of training teachers, do not negate a serious need for basic skills in teaching to be reviewed or taught to veteran and new teachers who lack them. With the reduction of professional training courses in in teacher education in some states being mandated, the need for staff development programs in the basic skills of teaching will grow. Furthermore, the anticipated demand for teachers will likely reduce quality in hiring. At one of the school sites in this study all five participants in the workshop were late hires (August). Additionally, in the next ten years, it is anticipated that the numbers of veteran teachers who have grown weary in their positions will increase. Refreshers in skillful teaching will remain useful for this population as well.

Staff development programs which are data-based, provide

systematic and objective feedback on classroom performance, involve and challenge teachers in self-analytic, small group discussions about their specific practices will tend to succeed, especially with marginal teachers who have not learned the basics of their profession.

Table 1

Proportion of Respondents Perceiving Classroom Observation as an Influence on Their Improvement (n=6)

| Categories | Responses | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Weak / | Neutral / | Strong |
| Peer observation | 50% | 17% | 33% |
| Knowing someone is observing you | 17 | 17 | 66 |
| Knowing behaviors were being coded | 0 | 0 | 100 |
| Coaching students to behave appropriately during observation | 100 | 0 | 0 |

Table 2

Proportion of Respondents Perceiving Workshop Factors as an Influence on Their Improvement (n=6)

| Categories | Responses | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Weak / Neutral / Strong | | |
| The profiles | 17% | 17% | 66% |
| Trainer relationship | 17 | 0 | 83 |
| Topics of the workshop | 0 | 0 | 100 |
| Reading workshop materials | 0 | 33 | 66 |
| Small group of teachers in workshop | 0 | 0 | 100 |
| Making a commitment each week to improve a specific teaching behavior | 0 | 17 | 83 |
| Hearing other teachers make commitments to improve | 0 | 0 | 100 |
| Reports from other teachers on strategies | 0 | 17 | 83 |
| Having someone in subject/grade level | 33 | 0 | 66 |
| Having someone from building being involved | 17 | 17 | 66 |
| Materials in addition to manual | 17 | 50 | 33 |
| Food at the workshop | 50 | 17 | 33 |
| Location of the workshop | 66 | 17 | 17 |

Table 3

Proportion of Respondents Perceiving Outside Events as an Influence on Their Improvement

| Categories | Responses | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Weak | Neutral | Strong |
| Discussions outside workshop | 33% | 0% | 66% |
| Discussions w/ trainer outside workshop | 17 | 17 | 66 |
| Building climate | 17 | 0 | 83 |
| Support from principal | 33 | 0 | 66 |
| Support from superintendent | 50 | 17 | 33 |
| Support from significant other | 66 | 17 | 17 |

Table 4 reflects participant responses to perceived influences and lists influences in descending order.

Table 4
Categories and Means of Influences on Improvement in Descending Order

| Categories | Mean |
|---|---|
| Small group of teachers in workshop | 6.2 |
| Relationship with trainer | 6 |
| Topics of the workshops | 6 |
| Reports from other teachers | 6 |
| Making commitments | 6 |
| Hearing commitments to improve | 6 |
| Knowing teaching behaviors being coded for second observation | 5.6 |
| Climate in your building | 5.2 |
| Reading workshop materials | 5.2 |
| The profiles | 5 |
| Knowing someone was going to observe you | 5 |
| Informal discussions | 4.8 |
| Discussions with trainer outside workshop | 4.8 |
| Teachers in my building were involved in workshop | 4.7 |
| Someone in subject area or grade level in workshop | 4.3 |
| Observation by peers | 4 |
| Materials, in addition to manual, trainer shared with you | 4 |
| Food/refreshments at workshop | 3.7 |
| Support from principal | 3.3 |
| Support from the superintendent or central office | 3.3 |
| Support from family/significant other | 2.5 |
| Location of workshop | 2.5 |
| Coaching your students on how to behave when observer was present | 1.2 |

Summary

Group size, relationship with trainer, workshop topics, teacher reporting of strategies and commitments were perceived to be the five strongest influences on improvement in their teaching according to teacher participants. Peer observation was rated as having less moderate influence than anticipated while climate of the school was rated as higher influence than expected. Support form family or significant other was perceived as having little influence on teacher change.

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