

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 382 942

CS 012 156

AUTHOR Lofton, Glenda G.; And Others  
TITLE Five Years after a State-Funded School Improvement Project, What Remains?  
PUB DATE 7 Apr 94  
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 4-8, 1994).  
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)  
  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS \*Administrator Attitudes; Elementary Education; Program Effectiveness; Program Implementation; \*Reading Improvement; Reading Research; \*State Programs; State School District Relationship; \*Teacher Attitudes  
IDENTIFIERS Administrator Surveys; Louisiana; \*Special Plan Upgrading Reading

## ABSTRACT

A study investigated whether Louisiana school districts and schools involved in the SPUR (Special Plan Upgrading Reading) program were implementing and maintaining essential elements of the project five years after termination of state funding and external support. Subjects were the 66 superintendents or their designee at the district level as well as the principals and three representative teachers knowledgeable of the SPUR program in each of the 225 schools serving as Model Schools when the project ended in 1988. Response rates on surveys was reasonably positive, with 76% of the districts and 44% of schools returning their forms. Results indicated that: (1) some form of collaborative planning and improvement process was being maintained in 80% of the districts and 90% of the Model Schools; (2) strong support was evident for SPUR's influence on the implementation and maintenance of improvement projects; (3) 41% of districts and 62% of schools maintained a focus or had fully integrated SPUR's 17 Criteria of Excellence into their ongoing improvement process; (4) supervisors and school personnel disagreed on factors contributing to the maintenance and ongoing improvement process; and (5) of the five districts once identified as successful implementers of the improvement process, three had taken specific actions to maintain and continue improvement efforts. A qualitative analysis of district and school data provided insight into five factors facilitating and impeding maintenance: level/type of involvement at the district level, leadership at the school level, collaboration at all levels, utilization/development of human resources, and teacher/student self-efficacy. (Contains 14 references.) (RS)

\*\*\*\*\*  
\* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made \*  
\* from the original document. \*  
\*\*\*\*\*

**FIVE YEARS AFTER A STATE-FUNDED SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT,  
WHAT REMAINS?**

Glenda G. Lofton  
Martha H. Head  
Southeastern Louisiana University

Flo Hill  
Livingston Public Schools

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the  
American Educational Research Association  
New Orleans, Louisiana

April 7, 1994

ES012156

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS  
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

*G. Lofton*

' BEST COPY AVAILABLE

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES  
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
Office of Educational Research and Improvement  
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION  
CENTER (ERIC)

- ☐ This document has been reproduced as  
received from the person or organization  
originating it
- ☒ Minor changes have been made to  
improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this  
document do not necessarily represent  
official OERI position or policy.

## **FIVE YEARS AFTER A STATE-FUNDED SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT, WHAT REMAINS?**

Glenda Lofton, Martha Head, Southeastern Louisiana University;  
Flo Hill, Livingston Public Schools

### **OBJECTIVES**

From 1979 to 1988, Louisiana sought to "put the pieces together" to build comprehensive reading programs in the 66 school districts in Louisiana. This study is part of a three phase research study conducted five years later to determine which "pieces" remain. Are districts and schools involved in the state-funded improvement project continuing to implement and maintain the essential elements of the project five years after the termination of state funding and external support? If so, what factors contributed to the maintenance and institutionalization of these elements into the ongoing operation of the district and/or school? If not, what factors impeded or contributed to the failure to maintain these elements?

### **PERSPECTIVES/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In 1979 the Louisiana Department of Education with the support of the legislature launched a statewide reading improvement effort called SPUR, Louisiana's Special Plan Upgrading Reading. Viewed by many as the most successful improvement effort in the history of the state, the project during its nine years of existence enjoyed many successes. Accomplishments included the following (Lofton, 1983, 1984):

\*Higher performance—30% fewer failures on State Basic Skills Tests despite lower SES; scores above the national average on the

Prescriptive Reading Inventory with increases over time,

- \*Increased unity, commitment, coordination, pride, sharing; improved attitude, climate as revealed through a descriptive study,

- \*90% Time on Task in SPUR classrooms,

- \*High parental/community involvement (A sample of Model Schools (1987-88) reported an average of 50 hours per week of volunteer service and averaged 75% attendance at parent/teacher conferences),

- \*Promotion of reading (A sample of Model Schools during 1987-88 reported an average of 15,146 books read per school/30 per child),

- \*Recognition of SPUR Model Schools by the International Reading Association for their contribution to reading improvement,

- \*Recognition of Model Schools by McDonald's Corporation as schools of excellence,

- \*Recognition of SPUR's potential for school improvement by an independent study group of the National Association of State Boards of Education, and

- \*Endorsement by business, industry, and labor groups in Louisiana.

SPUR likewise experienced many problems, obstacles and failures. (Lofton, 1988). Resistance to change is normal. Systems and schools participated with varying levels of commitment and ownership. The project had its avid proponents and opponents. In the face of severe economic difficulties and budget cuts, parents and proponents lobbied actively at the legislature for Spur's continuation. Three times the project was abolished and

reinstated before its termination by a new governor in March of 1988.

By design SPUR was to be of limited duration. The goal was to provide local leaders with the knowledge and skills to guide the improvement process independently. To increase the probability of this occurring, findings from the Rand Study (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978) on successful change efforts were used in the conceptualization of SPUR. During the 1970's, the Rand Corporation conducted a comprehensive follow-up study of federally initiated programs and innovations to determine where change and innovations had continued after the funding had ceased. The study identified a number of factors associated with the maintenance and continuation of desired changes. These included the following:

- (1) Successful projects were not projects at all but part of an ongoing problem-solving and improvement process. Through collaborative planning and problem-solving comes ownership and commitment to common goals.
- (2) Staff development was found to be part of this ongoing program improvement process. Effective staff development occurred in an organizational context where many role groups, not just teachers, were viewed as needing new skills. Particularly important were the staff development needs of district administrators and principals.
- (3) Staff training activities must be accompanied by training support activities if permanent change is to occur.
- (4) In the total program improvement process, staff development was accompanied by other aspects of change, such as curriculum

development, improved organizational frameworks, and administrative reform. District and school site organizational factors as well as the active involvement of both the principal and the school district leadership, were critical to the continuation of the desired changes.

(5) Reform or change was more a function of people and organization than of technology or finance.

In an effort to build on these principles of change, eight regionally based technical assistance teams provided onsite technical assistance and support in the implementation of an ongoing improvement process at the district and school level. Participation was voluntary. Staff at all levels were actively involved in collaborative planning, problem solving, and decision-making. Ongoing staff development at the state, regional, district and school levels was provided with planned follow-up, coaching and support. Networking, sharing, and visitations across districts and schools were actively encouraged. As a guide for the improvement process criteria or standards for exemplary reading programs were identified. Schools could pursue these criteria informally or formally seek designation and recognition as Model Schools. Formal designation as a Model School involved the visit of an external review team who evaluated the school's implementation of the criteria. Funds and resources were minimal; \$5000 was the maximum amount received by a district during any fiscal year.

As part of the program's ongoing evaluation, in 1983 external evaluators made on site visits to six districts identified by project staff as having successfully implemented SPUR; the

districts also represented a range of ways that the process could be used locally and adapted to varying contexts. Persons at the district and school level who had been active in SPUR were interviewed for their perceptions about how and why they had achieved reading and overall instructional improvement. Although each district was unique, some common factors emerged (Hoffman, Stewart, & Cantwell, 1983):

(1) **Central office support.** In each school system, the project had support from at least one key person in the central office who had the authority or leadership to establish SPUR. This key leader supported SPUR because he/she saw it as a vehicle to accomplish identified educational needs.

(2) **Active involvement/participation of the district and school.** The process could begin at the school or district level, but at some stage the interests and workings of the district and schools converged. This was the turning point in the project's success.

(3) **Role and quality of the external technical assistant.** The deliberately ambiguous, power-neutral role of the highly trained, technical assistants and the quality of the services they provided was viewed as crucial to the project's success.

(4) **Designation of Criteria of Excellence Model Schools.** The Model Schools served as concrete signs that progress had been achieved, upgraded the image of public education in the public's eye and were staffed by teachers and principals who could convince others that change was feasible.

(5) **Emotional commitment of participants.** For those schools who chose to pursue designation as a Criteria of Excellence Model

School, it was a lengthy and difficult process in which teachers were forced to question practices, make personal changes, and work collaboratively with others in pursuit of common goals.

(6) **Generic nature of the improvement process.** The process used to improve reading was a generic one that could apply to all instruction, making it more attractive to systems and schools.

(7) **Benefits.** Benefits in addition to reading improvement contributed to the program's adoption. These included improved working relationships within schools, between schools and the district staff, between local districts and the State Department of Education, and improved attitudes on the part of students and community members.

This qualitative study and more recent research seem to have reinforced many of the principles on which SPUR was based: Samuels' (1988) identification of exemplary reading programs; research on self-renewing schools (Joyce, 1993), research on changing school culture through staff development (Joyce, 1990), research on staff development through coaching (Brandt, 1987), research on school reform (Fullan, 1993), and recent syntheses of research on change (Fullan, 1993).

If, however, the ultimate success of any improvement effort is dependent upon the institutionalization of the process into the ongoing operation of the district or school after the funding and external support have ended, it becomes important to determine what is being maintained in these districts ten years after the initial study and five years after the project's termination.

#### **METHODS/TECHNIQUES/DATA SOURCE**

Maintenance of the essential elements of SPUR was determined



through surveys, onsite visits, and interviews of former participants in the project. Variations of surveys used as part of the original SPUR evaluations were used to collect data on participating districts and schools. Subjects in the study were Louisiana's 66 Superintendents or their designee at the district level as well as the principals and three representative teachers knowledgeable of the SPUR program in each of the 225 schools serving as Model Schools when the project ended. The surveys included demographic information, open-ended items targeting measures of observable outcomes, and items with a three-point Likert scale for indicating the degree of maintenance of the essential elements in SPUR.

In addition, onsite visits were made to five districts who participated in the qualitative study of SPUR conducted in 1983 (Hoffman, Cantwell & Stewart, 1983). An evaluator knowledgeable of the SPUR program visited each of the school systems and two former Model Schools within the district for a single day. At the district level, the evaluator interviewed the Superintendent or his designee and other district staff involved in SPUR. At the school level data was collected through interviews of the principal and teachers as well as an informal "walk through" and observation of the school to observe for maintenance of specific criteria.

Replicating methods used in the original study, a set of questions prepared in advance were used as probes. Interviews and questions from the original interviews were modified to emphasize maintenance of the process. Comments of the persons interviewed were tape recorded and compiled for each district. Responses were

analyzed in light of the level of maintenance and common themes were identified to provide insight into those factors associated with the maintenance of project elements. Differences across the five districts were also analyzed, providing a tentative understanding of SPUR's maintenance under varying conditions.

#### **RESULTS/CONCLUSIONS/IMPORTANCE**

The response rate on the survey was reasonably positive, with 76% of districts and 44% of schools returning their forms. Analysis of the survey data is still underway, so results reported in this paper should be considered preliminary.

Overall, it appeared that some form of a collaborative planning and improvement process was being maintained both in the districts and in the former Model Schools (80 and 90 percent, respectively). Strong support was evident for SPUR's influence on the implementation and maintenance of improvement projects; more than 75% of both schools and districts indicated that SPUR had either laid the groundwork for improvement projects or had had a significant impact on their improvement efforts. More specifically, 41% of districts and 62% of schools indicated that they were either maintaining a focus on or had fully integrated SPUR's 17 Criteria of Excellence into their ongoing improvement process.

District and individual school personnel did not agree, however, on the factors they believed had contributed to the maintenance of an ongoing improvement process. Superintendents cited bottom-line observable outcomes such as increased student achievement or staff unity, while principals and teachers felt that an understanding of the improvement process was more

important to maintenance. Impediments to maintenance were similar for the two groups; demands on staff time and the withdrawal of funding were most often cited.

Superintendents and school personnel also did not agree on the specific principles of change underlying SPUR that they would adopt if implementing a new improvement project. District personnel believed that leadership by principals was most important, while principals and teachers valued more highly the involvement and collaboration of teachers in the change process.

Both groups rated the improvement of instruction as the chief outcome of the SPUR project. Yet they differed in what things they are doing differently as a result of SPUR. District personnel focused on the importance of ongoing collaborative planning and monitoring of program implementation, while school-level respondents listed teaching and learning emphases most often. Both superintendents and principals felt that collaboration in the improvement process was the most important thing they had learned from SPUR; but teachers felt their greatest gain had been in implementing teaching strategies which are more child-focused .

In making suggestions for future improvement projects, superintendents cited the importance of utilizing highly-trained personnel and ongoing staff development. Principals saw teamwork and ownership of the process as being important. Teachers, on the other hand, seemed mainly to be concerned that the process be manageable in terms of time and energy it would require.

In addition to the survey results, tentative conclusions have also been drawn based on the on-site visits to the five districts

and two former Model Schools within each district. A central question guiding the analysis of these data has been: Are project elements being maintained at the district and school levels?

Although SPUR focused on the school as the unit of change, the district played an active role in the improvement process. Each district had a planning team which assessed strengths and needs and collaboratively developed a written plan for improvement. The plan included an emphasis on building comprehensive reading programs and ways that the district would support the schools.

Of the five districts once identified as successful implementers of the improvement process, three had taken specific actions to maintain and continue the improvement effort after funding and external support had ended. One indirectly contributed to the maintenance of the effort, and one had in fact taken actions that unintentionally impeded the process. In the three districts actively maintaining the improvement process, support varied in type and degree. A brief description of each district follows:

**District 1.** In District 1, all aspects of the improvement effort have been deliberately and actively maintained at the district and school level. Specific actions include the following: (1) Each school collaboratively develops an annual improvement plan, at the end of the year evaluates the plan, and submits it to the district office. (2) Every other year, external review teams made up of district and school level staff within the district make on-site visits to schools to assure that the Criteria of Excellence (SPUR, 1984), the 17 standards for exemplary

instructional programs are being maintained, to identify strengths and make recommendations. "The reviews serve as a reminder that these things are valued and important." A member of the district staff coordinates the reviews and provides continuity by serving on the review team for each school. On the alternating year internal reviews are held. (3) The Criteria are viewed not as ends in themselves but as a framework of proven instructional practices which has brought all schools to similar levels. The Criteria have had to be modified to make them more challenging. (4) A common knowledge base is maintained district-wide. For example, new teachers have five days of intensive training prior to the start of school as well as a staff development book for ongoing referral. (5) Staff training at all levels has continued. (6) Leadership training has been intensified. "If leaders have not had training they are not in the classroom implementing." (7) Collaboration occurs at and across all levels. Students are assuming larger roles in the teaching and learning process. At the high school, for example, students are conducting parent teacher conferences. (8) District staff are constantly in the schools, mentoring, supporting and listening. To quote a staff member, "You can't maintain sitting in the central office." (9) The district responds to the needs and concerns of the schools. When problems arise a group gets together to talk about it and district staff "listen harder." If the district needs to make changes and can, they do it. (10) District and school staffs collaboratively examine what they are doing and make modifications in light of assessment data and current research on teaching and learning. A common practice is the dissemination of articles on a related

topic followed by discussion groups at the district and school levels. New programs and innovations are integrated without abandoning the old. (11) Teacher empowerment is seen as the key to ongoing improvement. Teachers are active partners in the improvement process. Risk-taking is rewarded. Teachers are actively encouraged to build on existing strengths, pursue areas of interest, become the school-based expert on a particular new program or innovation, demonstrate and train others. (12) The district assures that quality highly trained personnel are in all positions. (13) The Superintendent and the Board actively support ongoing improvement. (14) Restructuring is viewed as a process for removing barriers that impede growth and development of students. Both schools in this district had not only maintained elements of the improvement process but had gone beyond. To quote the principal of one of the schools, "I think we've outgrown the Criteria of Excellence. Risk-taking is rewarded here."

District 2. District 2 has opted to focus on and maintain specific elements of the improvement process. Specific actions include the following: (1) Collaborative planning and problem-solving are modeled and utilized at all levels. (2) When SPUR was terminated, the district created a staff development coordinator, and hired their former SPUR Technical Assistant for the position. (3) Individuals trained in SPUR have been placed in key leadership positions; the Superintendent is a former SPUR principal. (4) A comprehensive plan for staff development is collaboratively developed with input from school and district staff. Staff development includes follow-up, coaching and support. (5) Central office instructional staff are assigned

specific schools for on-site technical assistance and support. When individuals who had not been trained in the improvement process are placed in leadership positions, they are mentored and supported by district staff. (6) Development and empowerment of teachers is a major goal. Teachers play an active role in planning and providing staff development. Collaboration, visitation, and sharing across schools is planned for and ongoing. (7) The district staff clearly view their role as making it easier for teachers to teach and students to learn; they are collaborative partners with the schools. (8) State mandates are viewed as opportunities for growth and improvement and are utilized as a means for achieving district goals. In District 2, both schools had maintained the improvement effort despite large turnovers in staff. Representative of the comments in these schools was a teacher's comment, "It's an exciting time. Everybody's aware of what we need to do and everybody wants to be good. Now we can try new things and just have fun."

**District 3.** When SPUR was terminated, District 3 had eight model schools. The district has continued the improvement process internally and now has 20 Model Schools. Specific actions include the following: (1) The district adopted the Criteria of Excellence as a framework for guiding the improvement effort at the local level. A district staff person is responsible for the improvement process. Review teams from across the district determine when a school has successfully achieved the Criteria. Early on, the district scheduled visits to existing Model Schools every three years to assure maintenance of the Criteria, but that had been abandoned due to the costs in personnel time. (2) Each school

develops and implements an annual improvement plan. The district's plan provides one common focus. (3) The district has placed a curriculum coordinator in each school to provide on-site technical assistance and support for the improvement effort. (4) The district encourages schools to seek Southern Association accreditation as a means of motivating and continuing the improvement process. (5) The district uses state mandates as a stimulus for maintaining program elements such as parent-community involvement, school improvement plans. (6) Staff development opportunities are abundant. The Board supports staff development with funds and released time.

Both schools in this district had maintained the improvement process and showed evidence of growth in specific criteria. Comments indicative of these schools included, "When something works, it won't go away. It's just standard operating procedure."

**District 4.** In District 4 no direct actions had been taken at the district level to continue the process. Key individuals who had actively supported the improvement effort were no longer in the district. The district had recently put two of the former SPUR technical assistants in instructional positions but their roles did not directly involve maintenance of the improvement process. Funding and implementation of state mandates had been the focus at the district level.

While no direct actions had been taken by the district, the improvement process and Criteria of Excellence were clearly in evidence at the two schools visited despite new principals. Indirectly the district had contributed. According to a district staff member, "The principal is the key. We knew we had to put



strong instructional leaders in the Model Schools. The teachers and the parents demanded it." A teacher commented, "It's the way we do things around here. It makes a difference for kids."

District 5. District 5 had taken no specific actions to maintain the process. Other priorities have taken precedence. Responding to state mandates, the district and schools have recently initiated a mentoring program for beginning teachers and have developed written plans for improving scores on state tests and encouraging parent and community involvement. For certain activities such as textbook adoption, the district found themselves relying on the planning process learned in SPUR but the process was not ongoing. Although staff development was not provided by the district, teachers were provided released time to attend conferences and other professional development activities. Several factors at the district level seemed to have impeded maintenance of the improvement process: (1) The district had consolidated from 21 to 12 schools. Model schools had been closed or merged with other schools. (2) A core group of Chapter 1 reading specialists who had received intense training in the improvement process and served as internal technical assistants within their schools were placed back in traditional roles as corrective/remedial teachers. (3) Key individuals who had supported the process were no longer in the district.

On-site visits to two schools revealed that project elements were strongly maintained in one school and very limited in the other. Comments in the maintaining school indicated that the process and behaviors had become institutionalized, "It's just a part of us. We might abandon some things briefly, but we just

keep coming back to them because they work. " A revealing comment at the non-maintaining school was, "When we achieved Model Status, teachers felt we had reached the pinnacle. Teachers just shut down. Like Michael Jordan, there was no place left to go."

In summarizing maintenance across the five districts, nine of the ten schools visited had not only maintained changes and improvements but showed evidence of growth in the areas addressed by the "Criteria of Excellence," 17 standards for exemplary reading programs which had provided focus for the improvement effort. Areas most frequently identified in interviews and most highly visible in schools included the following: (1) use of the structure and process for planning and decision-making, (2) emphasis on oral and written communication, (3) emphasis on recreational reading and reading stimulus projects, (4) emphasis on higher level thinking, (5) accommodation of individual differences, (6) sound teaching and learning techniques, and (7) parent/community involvement. In keeping with the original goal of SPUR, the practices had become internalized into the culture and expectations of the school although many teachers were not aware of their origin and only two of the ten schools still provided formal emphasis on the Criteria of Excellence.

What factors facilitated/impeded maintenance of the improvement process?

A qualitative analysis of district and school data provides insight into factors facilitating and impeding maintenance.

**1. Level/types of involvement at the district level.** There seemed to be a strong relationship between the level and types of district involvement and maintenance within schools. The level and

type of involvement determined whether the school "maintained" the Criteria of Excellence and "got better" or whether the school used the Criteria as a foundation for pursuing new challenges and innovations. Interviews and observations indicate that districts fell along a continuum with District 1 showing the highest level of maintenance and District 5 showing the lowest level. Additional support for this is found in the comments of individuals interviewed in the respective districts. According to the Concerns Based Adoption Model, there are seven stages of concern that individuals go through in adopting a change or innovation (Hord, Hurling-Austin, & Hall, 1987). Concerns range from a focus on self (awareness, informational and personal concerns), to task (management concerns), to impact on students (consequence, collaboration and refocusing concerns). Prevailing comments in District 1 suggest that individuals for the most part are at level 6, the refocusing stage; District 2 is at level 5, the collaboration stage; Districts 3 and 4 are at level 4, the consequence stage. In District 5, the maintaining school is at the consequence stage and the non-maintaining school is again at level 0, an awareness stage in which they are no longer concerned about the improvement process.

**2. Leadership at the school level.** The improvement effort continued, with or without district support, in those schools where leadership was provided by a principal or by a core group of teachers. In one school, for example, there were only two staff members who had been involved in SPUR, a teacher and the principal. The principal had been a teacher in the school during the project's duration, had learned that the practices worked, and

had continued them. In another school a core group of teachers had maintained the improvement effort when a new, inexperienced principal was appointed. The principal noted, "The teachers in this school are so strong. The former principal had told me, but I'm just now understanding what he meant. You just give them an idea and let them go with it." The chairperson of the school's planning team commented, "We've let a few things slide, but we're getting focused again. You know we have a new principal, but we like him and we're all helping him."

It is also interesting to note that growth and improvement continued in these schools despite large turnovers in staff. . Traditionally staff turnover is associated with low maintenance of an improvement or innovation. In the ten schools visited only two schools still had the same principal. Most schools had experienced at least a 50 percent turnover in staff. Other factors such as strong school leadership seem to determine the impact of staff turnover and reorganization. One district, when questioned about the large turnover and movement from one school to another, saw movement as an opportunity to spread the improvement process rather than an inhibitor of the process.

**3. Collaboration at all levels.** When all role groups at the district and school level work together as equals, the result is a community of learners and an environment in which innovation and experimentation naturally evolve. Collaboration does not mean abdication of responsibility as leaders. It does not mean an absence of clearly defined expectations or structure. In District 1 expectations are clearly defined. There is a lot of structure; the key is flexibility within that structure.

**4. Utilization/development of human resources.** Districts and schools who recognized, utilized, and built on the knowledge and strengths of individuals fostered ongoing improvement. The most successful districts utilized the expertise of individuals, for example, who had received intensive training during SPUR by putting them in key leadership positions. SPUR technical assistants had been hired; principals and teachers trained in the improvement process had been promoted. One principal had even become superintendent. "If it had not been for SPUR," he noted, "I would still be playing 'Dear Abby' in my school, responding to the latest crisis."

Successful districts likewise made the development of human resources a number one priority. Staff development for leaders in District 1 was not just continued; it was intensified. A common knowledge base at the district level became the foundation and impetus for creativity and innovation. As Piaget pointed out, to understand is to invent (Piaget, 1972).

Informal day to day activities and interactions are seized upon as opportunities to help someone grow. In District 2 even the visit of the researchers collecting data for this study was used as an opportunity to recognize and reinforce the development of individuals within the district. Instructional support staff never attend a conference without taking just the right teacher along. Informal discussion and sharing groups around a common theme are emerging as powerful tools for staff development.

Formal staff development activities are purposeful and clearly focused on the needs of individuals and the goals of the district. Individuals are expected to implement and share what is

learned with others. Without this one principal pointed out "teachers become workshop junkies."

**5. Teacher/student self-efficacy.** Teacher self-efficacy appears to be an outcome of a viable and ongoing improvement process. Teacher self-efficacy was not unique to those districts and schools maintaining at the highest levels but there it was most pervasive. Neither did the absence of teacher self-efficacy necessarily indicate the absence of growth and improvement. In one school for example, instructional practices incorporated within the Criteria of Excellence had become institutionalized and there was evidence of continued growth and improvement. Teachers, for the most part however, were not as open and appeared more tentative in discussing what they did and why they did it. Missing was the confidence and enthusiasm observed in other schools who had institutionalized project elements. Conversations with staff members revealed that teachers in the school had initially perceived the process as a means for "fixing them," a process for assuring accountability rather than a process for ongoing growth and improvement. This was partly due to a project staff member who was subsequently replaced; however, the perceptions had remained. It seems where teachers and staff clearly understand the purpose and intent of the improvement process and their role in it, self-efficacy "unconsciously evolves."

Teacher self-efficacy begets student self-efficacy. In District 1, for example, teachers and students are collaborating. Students are assuming responsibility and ownership for their own learning. As students understand their role in the teaching learning process, learning is maximized and new challenges are

sought. It is trite but true; teachers and students are empowered.

When district and school staff participating in this study were directly asked reasons for maintaining the improvement process, typical responses included: "It works. It just makes sense. When something is sound, it won't go away. It makes a difference for kids. It's just a part of us." For some the response was more personal, "I am what I am because of SPUR." Most of these statements are simply stated. Examination of trends and patterns across districts and schools suggests, however, that maintenance is facilitated and impeded by many complex and interrelated factors.

This paper has reviewed five factors which seem to have particular significance for future improvement efforts. Probably the best synthesis of these factors is provided in the remarks of the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction in District 1. This district's actions had not only resulted in maintenance of an ongoing improvement process but had resulted in teacher and student self-efficacy, risk-taking and innovation. The Assistant Superintendent stated that (a) SPUR had been the catalyst for change in their district. (b) Schools had achieved quality and equity as a result of the "Criteria of Excellence (COE)." (c) The Criteria had served as an impetus for collaboration among district staff, principals and teachers. (d) It gave the leadership the knowledge and the "know-how" for effecting change in classrooms. (e) It had demonstrated the value of uniform training and follow-up. (f) It had empowered teachers. (g) Once these essential elements (inputs) were in place, the district and schools could focus on outcomes and innovations. (h) They were in a position to

remove barriers and to restructure, in pursuit of their mission to save all kids.



## REFERENCES

- Brandt, R. (1987). Staff development through coaching. (Special issue). Educational Leadership. 44(5).
- Fullan, M. (1993). Innovation, reform, and restructuring strategies. In G. Cawelti (Ed), Challenges and achievements of American education, (pp. 116-133). 1993 ASCD Yearbook. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Fullan, M. G. (1993). Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform. Bristol, PA: Falmer Press.
- Hoffman, L.M., Cantwell, E.H. & Stewart, S.L. (1983). "Because we're better"...How and why six school systems adopted SPUR. (Research Report). Baton Rouge: Louisiana Department of Education.
- Hord, S.M., Rutherford, W.L., Hurling-Austin, L., & Hall, G.E. (1987). Taking charge of change. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Joyce, B., Wolf, J., & Calhoun, E. (1993). The Self-renewing school. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Joyce, B. (Ed.). (1990). Changing school culture through staff development. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Lofton, G.G. (1983). Building a comprehensive reading program. In G.H. McNinch (Ed.). Reading research to reading practice, (pp.33-38), Third Yearbook of the American Reading Forum. Athens, GA: The American Reading Forum.

- Lofton, G.G. (1984). Structuring an environment for increased comprehension, communication, and computer literacy—from a state college, system and school perspective. In G.H. McNinch, G.F. Lentini, & M.B. Creamer (Eds.). Reading research in 1984: Comprehension, computers, communication, (pp.46–50), Fifth Yearbook of the American Reading Forum. Athens, GA: The American Reading Forum.
- Lofton, G.G. (December 1988). Effecting change in school reading programs: The process, the successes, the pitfalls. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Reading Forum, Longboat Key, FL.
- McLaughlin, M.W. & Marsh, D.D. (1978, September). Staff development and school change. Teachers College Record, 69–94.
- Piaget, J. (1972). To understand is to invent: The future of education. New York: Grossman Publishers.
- Samuels, J.S. (1981). Characteristics of exemplary reading programs. In J. Guthrie (Ed.) Comprehension and teaching: Research reviews, (pp. 255–273). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- SPUR Staff (1984). Louisiana's Criteria of Excellence. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana Department of Education.