

Understanding the Change Process

Change is inevitable. There is no preventing change from occurring; however its direction and outcome may be influenced. Change is a process, not an event. No innovation has ever been successfully implemented overnight.

It is an additive process, a process of ever-increasing options in how people behave. People cannot be forced to adopt the change process. They always have a choice to resume previous behaviors. Many events that occur during the change process can be anticipated. There are personal and organizational reactions that are predictable, and some negative reactions can be prevented by appropriate interventions. It is important to understand that people can only be given the opportunity to change. Change naturally occurs when parts of a larger system begins to operate differently. These 'parts' react differently and therefore play different roles in the change process. Some co-workers will help the process; others will hinder it. Developing an awareness and understanding the process of change can help school districts work through change, and increase the likelihood for successful. An attempt has been made to put some "flesh and bone" on this abstract topic by providing a model for planning and implementing interventions: Care, Relate, Examine, Acquire, Try, Extend, Renew. (Havelock, R.G. 1995 *The Change Agent@ Cuide 2nd Edition*) Each stage consists of specific objectives, methods and common mistakes. As our school district, campuses and departments look at ways to operate differently, perhaps it may be beneficial to all to have a common vocabulary and understanding of how and why change occurs.

In March of 1999 our Special Services, Special Education

Department agreed to participate in a study.

This study: EMSTAC (Elementary and Middle School Technical Assistance Center) is funded by the U.S. Department of Education Special Educations Programs. The mission is to develop a comprehensive model of technical assistance that can be used nationwide to improve results for children with disabilities.

How does the change process fit in? An increasing number of special education students are being served in the general education environment. These students and their teachers need to receive accommodations and support on a regular basis to improve learning outcomes.

Research has produced an impressive knowledge base on principles of effective practice, but these principles are too infrequently found in the classroom, school and district practice. An infrastructure of support that has the potential to help educators, families, schools, and school districts exists at the national and state level, but needs alignment with local efforts. In an effort to bring research practices into the classrooms and provide the needed "Technical Assistance," EMSTAC is working with "Linking Agents" in local schools districts to facilitate the use of effective practices. The Linking Agent has an understanding of the process of bringing innovation to the district/school/classroom. To affect change in practices, the Linking Agents role is to:

- ◆ Locate and help select effective practices;
- ◆ Know the content, purpose, and benefits that result from each new practice;
- ◆ Help arrange and conduct training in the new practice, working with external assistance when necessary;
- ◆ Arrange funding and other support from district or other resources;

new practice from the superintendent, school board, principal, and teacher;

- ◆ Working with teachers using practice in the classroom, working out "bugs" and overcoming obstacles;

- ◆ Assist in the evaluation of the practice; and

- ◆ Help to plan how to continue and institutionalize the new practice. Technical assistance intervention can come in many forms. The Linking Agent uses the "Change Process" to ensure successful coordination and implementation of all interventions

By, *EPISD Special Education Linking Agent*