Introduction

Education in general and special education in particular have needs and problems that often seem limitless. Fortunately, large numbers of talented and passionate people are dedicated to finding ways to fill these needs and solve these problems. In short, they are trying to change the educational system and improve the educational opportunities for all children. They are change agents.

Anyone who tries to bring about change is a change agent. Even though they all have the same general goal, change agents use different approaches. However, an effective change agent has special skills and knowledge from which others can benefit. Most change agents are content experts: doctors, lawyers, engineers, scientists, and, of course, teachers at all levels. Another common type of change agent is the advocate. These people want to help others and have some idea of what the problems are and what changes will lead to improvement. However, because advocates believe they already know what the real problems are and what the real solutions should be, they are inclined to push hard to get their ideas accepted by explaining, persuading, and training. This straightforward maximum effort strategy sometimes works, but more often it does not. Instead of inspiring people, it repels them. Instead of overcoming opposition, it builds resistance. Change agents who adopt the advocacy role are often unsuccessful.

Over many years, other types of change agent roles have proved to be more effective in many situations. Prominent among these is the role of process consultant or process helper. This role derives from the tradition of nondirective counseling developed by Carl Rogers (1951), among others. The process consultant does not provide solutions but nurtures a social process in which the system in need examines itself and solves its own problems through collaborative interaction.

Process change agents are a rarer breed; they are people who have the special understanding and skill to make real change happen. Many of these process change agents are also content experts, but over the past three decades, a new class of helpers has arisen who are primarily experts on the process rather than the content of change. These process change agents fall along a continuum from advocates tied to specific content areas at one end to counselors and therapeutic consultants with no ties to content at the other.

The linkage approach, which is offered in *Guiding Change,* presents yet another way of promoting the change process. A successful change requires many parts and many players. It requires a good social process among key players, a full understanding of needs, a serious search for appropriate solution ideas, and a pulling together of resources of various kinds. To move this process along, you need change agents with a special mix of skills. They should know how to bring people together to work on problems and solutions in a way that

connects those in need to a larger world of solution ideas and resources. Connection is the core idea behind this role. Thus, we call this person a linking agent or a linker. *Guiding Change* defines what a linker is and explains how you can become one, regardless of where in the educational system you are working.

The linker can work across the process continuum, sometimes organizing a group to work as a change team, sometimes helping define needs, sometimes searching for new ideas and solutions, and sometimes helping implement the change on which the group has decided to work. Process versus content: what is the right mix for an effective change agent overall? There is no right answer to this question because sometimes a system needs a strong infusion of new content, new ideas, new technologies, and so forth. At other times, a system may be awash in new material but not have a clue what to do with it. An effective linker is ready to help with the process and make multiple connections to the universe of content resources, balancing inputs with what seems to be right for the user at a particular time and in a particular circumstance.

The Promise: New Knowledge, New Resources, New Structures

As we begin a new millennium, we see unmistakable signs of new hope and new energy focused on the problems of education in general and special education in particular. The body of useful educational knowledge has been steadily increasing in size and quality over the past 40 years. It is now becoming more accessible to users at all levels and in all locations, thanks to the Internet and other advances in communications technology. Spread before us is a vast menu of innovative offerings, model schools, model curricula, and model practices, not to mention a growing abundance of packaged products and programs.

Several things are special about special education. The first is the nature of the students who are within our purview. They have needs that other students do not have. These special needs are extremely diverse in nature and degree. To meet these needs, our society has assembled a corps of highly skilled, highly dedicated teachers. Special education has also become a magnet for technological innovation. Thanks to advancing technology, we are increasingly able to create new options and open new doors at every level. Another special advantage is the strong advocacy of highly concerned and highly motivated parents. Thanks in large part to them, but also to the equal opportunity values of the larger society, special education attracts extra resources from local, state, and federal sources out of proportion to the numbers of students involved. Partly as a result of this favorable political attention, special educators have been able to create an infrastructure and knowledge resource base that mirrors education in general but is in some ways stronger.

Given these potential advantages, the evolution of a new role of linker makes special sense in special education. Many of the pieces of the educational change puzzle are on the table. We now need people at different levels of the system who can show how the pieces fit together.

Knowledge Base Boxes: What Are They?

A massive literature of research, theory, and observation has accumulated about all the topics covered in *Guiding Change.* Because this book is intended primarily as a manual for practitioners and is based on a complex synthesis of different approaches melded into a coherent strategic orientation, it is neither possible nor appropriate to cite chapter and verse for every proposition made. However, for those who would like to see some of the research and documentation that underlie our major premises, we have provided a series of knowledge base boxes to illustrate some of this background and to point to other references for deeper exploration of many issues. This format allows a full reading of the text without interrupting the conceptual flow.

Knowledge Base

Why Focus on Change Process in Special Education?

Public Law 105–17, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997, was the most significant change in the IDEA since its original 1975 enactment as Public Law 94–142. It mandates much stronger links between special and general education and insists on a much expanded effort toward inclusion, among other changes. The law also sharpens the links between IDEA-funded research, IDEA-funded technical assistance and dissemination, local educational practice, and student outcomes (e.g., Section 685), requiring the Secretary of Education to provide technical assistance to help local districts carry out local capacity-building and improvement projects (Section 685).

These changes were timely: Although special education research has produced an impressive knowledge base of principles of effective practice, these principles are rarely reflected in practice (Malouf & Schiller, 1995; U.S. Department of Education, 1995). Although increasing numbers of students with disabilities are being served in general education environments, neither they nor their teachers receive the support needed to improve learning outcomes (Wagner, Blackorby, Cameto, Hebbeler, & Newman, 1993). Complicating this picture is the potential for general education reform to increase the marginalization of students with disabilities while providing opportunities for them (Skirtic, 1991; McLaughlin & Warren, 1992; Cook, Gerber, & Semmel, 1997). In simplest terms, there is a tremendous gap between accumulated knowledge and practice.

This gap is even greater for special education (Carnine, 1997; Malouf & Schiller, 1995; U.S. Department of Education, 1995). More and more educators are being asked to include students with disabilities in their classrooms when they have neither the training nor the motivation to serve them, which breeds attitudes that often produce negative learning outcomes (Goodlad, 1984; McDermott, 1993; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994; Pellegrini & Horvat, 1995).

In 1997, the U.S. Department of Education took a step toward bridging the gap by sponsoring a Center to Identify and Meet Technical Assistance Needs of Elementary and Middle Schools. The primary mission of this center was to develop a new type of knowledge-linking change agent, trained to provide better linkage between the knowledge base and special educators at the local level. It targeted practice improvements related to serving children with disabilities. *Guiding Change* grew out of that successful project (Hamilton et al., 2002).

Understanding Change as a Process

Change has both a content and a process. The content is what you want to achieve; the process is how you get there. The content of a particular reform initiative may concern the inclusion of children with special needs in the general education classroom or the implementation of a new reading program to assist children with learning disabilities in reading comprehension. That is what you want to accomplish.

To get there, you will have to understand the program in depth and the particulars of the setting in which it will be introduced. You will have to understand what the current level of need is and what the teachers, both regular and special, now think about these issues. You will have to bring people together, probably across levels, perhaps including the school principal and district-level specialists. You may also need to research many outside sources to find alternative program models. All these activities fall in the category of process and they all can be directed or managed by a linker.

What *Guiding Change* Is Designed to Do

Guiding Change in Special Education is designed to define the LINKER as a new role for reform-minded special educators, illustrate how PROBLEMS in special education can be framed for solution, allow a better understanding of the SOCIAL SETTING in which the reform happens, provide an expanded view of RESOURCES for change and how to gain access to them, and guide change teams toward workable PLANS for choosing and implementing a reform.

A Case to Ponder

Mrs. Byron has a problem. An experienced and respected second-grade teacher, she is confronted with an unruly boy, Jay, who grabs, hits, and yells. Jay is not a bad student and works in a nondisruptive manner when his teacher provides direct instruction, but when students are divided into tables of four and eight, he loses control. His asocial behavior is accentuated by the consequent disapproval and isolation from his fellow students. In spite of her long experience teaching kindergarten through fourth grade and her generally easy command of progressive classroom practices, Mrs. Byron does not know what to do.

Reaching Out for Help

Mrs. Byron takes the problem to the school principal, Dr. Elaine Rogers, who sees the problem in the context of a rise in behavioral referrals and a still wider context of violence in schools across the state as reported in the media. She also has an image to uphold a rating of her school as "exemplary" on "educational improvement." She is puzzled that this experienced teacher has come to her with such a problem; it contradicts her theory that classroom management is primarily a problem for inexperienced first-year teachers. With the

situation unresolved, Mrs. Byron makes repeated but unsuccessful attempts to reach Jay's parents by phone. She then turns for help to Ms. Sue Peters, the school counselor.

A First Response

Ms. Peters takes direct action, summoning Jay's reluctant parents to a meeting at the school, some distance from their farm in this rural district. The parents deny knowledge of any behavioral problems with Jay but give a number of details of his home life and his relationship with an older brother. This information is gained at the cost of resentment from Jay's father, who now blames the school for the problem and asserts that he will not cooperate further.

An Innovative Solution Idea

Ms. Peters and Mrs. Byron confer on what to do next. An indirect solution is proposed by Ms. Peters, an innovative program called cooperative discipline (CD), which had been featured in a presentation at a recent teacher conference. CD was designed as a schoolwide program requiring heavy parental involvement and student participation in setting goals and deciding on appropriate behaviors. Ms. Peters had previously discussed the program with a receptive Dr. Rogers. Now, teaming up with Mrs. Byron, she sets out to test the possibility of a schoolwide implementation of CD. She organizes a meeting with eight teachers, including Mrs. Byron, all of whom had been exposed to CD at the teacher conference and most of whom have experienced classroom behavioral disruptions. Four of the eight buy into the idea of CD implementation; four decline, claiming a lack of time and retaining a perception that the program requires too much commitment and disrupts established classroom routines.

Trial Implementation

Ms. Peters invests substantial energy in preparing social-skills classroom guidance lessons, a sample classroom meeting, and a series of "Stop and Think" posters for prominent display in all classrooms as reminders of the new patterns. The involved teachers send letters to all their parents, inviting them to a special meeting to discuss the cooperative discipline technique. The meeting is well attended, although Jay's parents are absent. The parents generally respond positively to the CD plans, but the discussion also feeds anxieties about media reports of school violence. Dr. Rogers reassures the parents that full precautions are taken at this school. The parents agree to cooperate with the start-up of the CD program and to meet again in 5 weeks.

Early Success

For 5 weeks, the CD program seems to evolve very smoothly. Ms. Peters and Dr. Rogers independently keep tabs on early results, and both observe that fewer classroom disruptions and fewer disciplinary referrals occur. The innovative program seems to be working, and the principal is happy about it.

A Regressive Moment

In week 5, prior to the second parent meeting, Jay gets into a fight as he leaves the school bus. His disruptiveness carries over into the classroom, forcing Mrs. Byron to give him private attention to restore a temporary equilibrium. During the noon recess, under the watchful eye of Mrs. Byron and two other teachers, the socially isolated Jay acts out again, disrupting games and receiving another heavy dose of teasing and taunting. Jay takes the law into his own hands, stabbing another student hard in the arm with a pencil. No serious physical harm is done, but Jay is sent home with a 3-day suspension. His parents hear his side of the story and probably feel some of his pain.

Shut Down

The second CD meeting with parents occurs 3 days later, with Jay's parents in attendance. The school playground incident takes center stage. A shouting match ensues between Jay's father and the father of the stabbed boy. The principal, Dr. Rogers, and the CD program come under attack. Immediately after the meeting and without further consultation with anyone, Dr. Rogers unilaterally decides to abandon the CD program and informs the stunned Ms. Peters.

What Happened?

This is a sad story, a story about good people with good intentions who seem to make a good effort in a good cause. Why did they fail? What can we learn? Three major elements of the story stand out: concerns, people, and processes.

Concerns

This story is energized throughout by a host of strongly felt and often conflicting concerns. We start with Jay, frustrated, angry, isolated, teased, and tormented by his peers. He is, at this moment, a special child because he needs special attention and he gets it: from his peers, his teacher, his principal, and the school counselor; from his parents; and ultimately from the whole school. But none is the kind of attention that he really wants.

In addition is the general concern for behavioral disruption. The teachers feel it directly and they pass it on to the principal. The principal is also concerned about her reputation, both as an innovator and as the person to whom parents look to maintain control and protect their children. The whole community is concerned about school violence, which is frequently reported in the news media.

People

Each of the many people in the story is in his or her own way a problem solver. They form a complex network of social relationships. Some are strong. Some are weak. Some are hierarchical, some are collegial, and some are parental

and familial. Sometimes these people act in concert as if they were one problem solver, but more often they go their separate ways or act as if they could. The parents' domain is the family and the household. The teachers' domain is the classroom.

Process

The narrative breaks into phases, but there is no overall model or process of change at work. Underneath it all, however, many models of change are at work, models of people trying to solve problems, trying to do the right thing, trying to keep things under control, and trying to do some new things that will make the system work better as a whole.

Basic Ideas and Definitions in the Change Discourse

We are all systems, just as we are all within systems. The term *system,* as used in *Guiding Change,* refers to any group of people who act together for common purposes. All the people involved in special education constitute a system, as do those who work only in a particular locality, school district, school, or classroom. The system includes those who are being served as students with special needs as well as those who serve them.

In *Guiding Change,* we will always talk about positive change, change that improves the circumstances of some system. With positive change, benefits strongly outweigh costs and can be sustained over a long time. *Guiding Change* also takes the view that systems should be deeply involved in changing themselves, taking command of their own change process while reaching out wisely and selectively for the help of others. Change should be system self-improvement.

A helping instinct lies deep within all of us. We count on this in the change process, both in ourselves and in others. This instinct is more highly developed in some people than in others, and a good change agent, like a doctor or a teacher, has to have a lot of it. We always need people who really care to provide the requisite energy to initiate a change process and to keep it going through to implementation.

> The helping instinct is strong in teacher Byron and even stronger in counselor Peters, who reaches out to parents. Ms. Peters is someone who always makes an extra helping effort.

In contemplating your own role in the change process, consider whether you are entering the scene as an insider or an outsider. Many users of *Guiding Change* will identify themselves as members of the system being helped, which is sometimes called the client system, whereas others may see themselves as outsiders who enter the system to provide help and intend to move on to help other systems. *Guiding Change* is written for both insiders and outsiders. Its major principles work equally well for both, but the difference in perspective is important. Sometimes the linking agent moves across the line from insider to outsider and back again as the change process moves along.

The Cycle of Change

All living systems maintain themselves in a state of quasi-equilibrium, coming apart and coming together again in endless cycles. Thus, the cycle is a fundamental notion in understanding all life processes, including the change process. All change activities move in cycles. People and social organizations require various sorts of problem solving to survive in a changing world. The underlying cycle of all such problem-solving activity involves a need and the response to that need. When the response fails to satisfy the need, the cycle repeats itself. The needy person or system tries again with the same response or a different response until the need is satisfied in some way.

Much of what passes as problem solving is reflexive, as epitomized in the expression, "Don't just stand there! Do something!" However, for any problem that is complex, enduring, and difficult, a one-step reflexive response is a poor guide to sensible action. The real key to effective problem solving is to get beyond simple one-step or two-step modes of thought and action by adding reasoning steps to the cycle. Rational action involves taking extra steps before a final action—stopping to think, stopping to explore, and stopping to plan.

## Guiding Change Through a Seven-Stage Cycle

Guiding Change sets forth the notion that effective problem solving requires a series of stages, starting with a definition of the need and the problem and moving on to a concerted search for solution ideas and relevant resources. Using this knowledge, a linking agent can help the members of the client system sort through the assembled ideas and resources to find the combination that makes the most sense and has the best fit to the problem at hand. To complete the cycle, the preferred solution idea is put into action through a coherent plan to give the best chance of success. At each stage, the plan involves as many members of the system as possible.

The seven stages in the problem-solving cycle are summarized by seven verbs: care, relate, examine, acquire, try, extend, and renew. The initial letters of these words spell the acronym CREATER. They are depicted in Figure 1 as a circle surrounding another circle, symbolizing the completion of one process and suggesting the induction of another. Each stage represents a cluster of issues and actions that are important in understanding and guiding a change process. Although they are presented as a sequence, each stage is relevant throughout a change project. They build on one another and depend on one another and connect to one another in many ways, even though they are also conceptually distinct.

Care

Problem solving always starts with the recognition that something is wrong, that a situation requires change. This is Stage 1: Care, the rock-bottom prerequisite for a change activity. The level of caring is the energizer. It is not rational. It is what people feel more than what they think, but it is nevertheless the required beginning point for any rational process. Chapter S-1 of *Guiding*

Figure 1   The Core Concept Bundle: Seven Ideas in a Circle
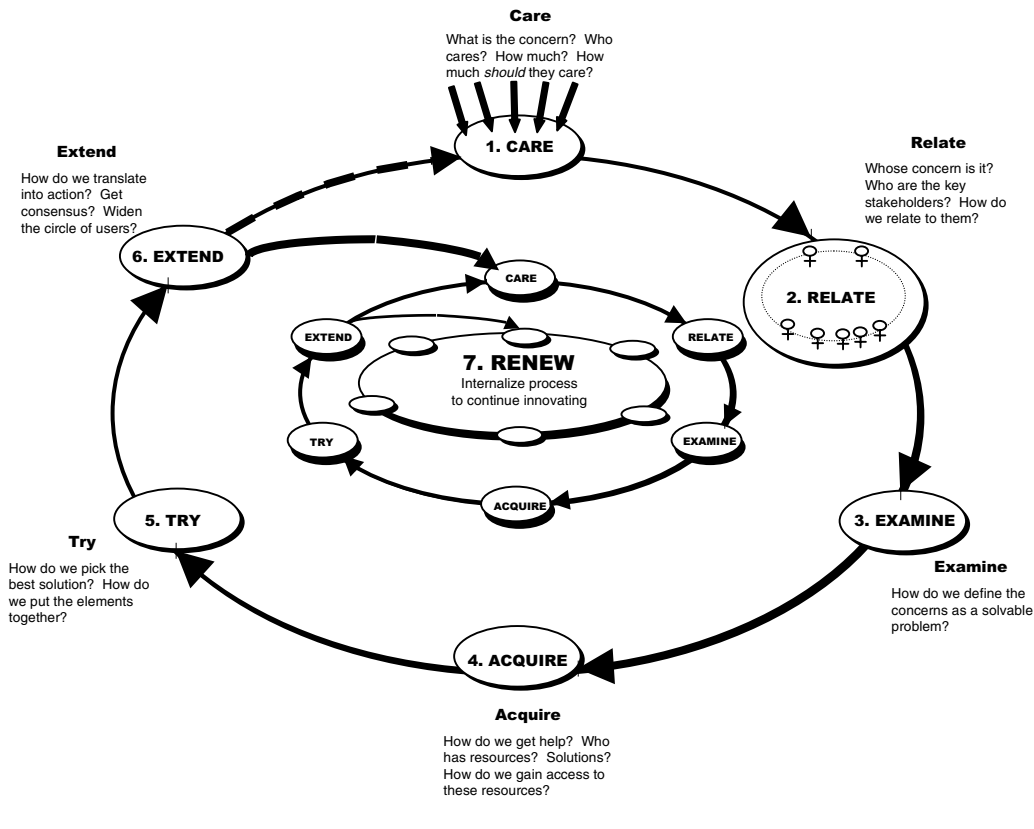
Change is devoted to the issue of caring: Who cares? How much do they care? How much should they care? It also considers the possibility that too much caring, too high a level of anxiety about getting something done, can actually get in the way of a positive change process.

Relate

Change never occurs in a social vacuum: There are always people to consider, different people with different needs but related to one another in complex ways. Thus, a crucial consideration is how to relate to the system as a complex social entity. Successful change agents are not merely technical experts; they are people movers. The psychological and social aspects of the change effort must always be kept front and center. The relationships of the change agent to the system and of the system to itself must always be nurtured. As the process unfolds over time and through successive problem-solving stages, the linker must return again and again to ask whether relationships are still holding and whether the system as a whole has enough integration to support the change effort.

A key to building relationships is creating a change team, a cluster of collaborators who work with the linker to sustain the effort and cement relationships to the larger system. As the change team defines the problem and reaches

out for solutions, participation and involvement must continue as widely as possible. This sense of participation must be maintained at each stage so that the final solution will be "owned" by those who are affected by it.

Examine

When we consider needs, we must distinguish between caring and understanding. The examine stage is about the latter. In medical parlance, it is the diagnostic phase, the stage at which different needs and symptoms are sorted out and prioritized. Systems often need expert help with examining and defining what their real needs are, given a base of concern and a social will to do something about that concern. Examine is also a social process that requires some kind of consensus on what the problems are and in what order they should be taken up.

Acquire

Guiding Change departs from other conceptions of change agency by emphasizing the search for and acquisition of resources—and not just financial resources. Resources come in many forms: people, program ideas, research findings, and model projects that have been tried elsewhere, near or far. The rise of the Internet has given new life, meaning, and richness to this search.

Try

Every new change effort should be designed first as a trial, an open experiment that allows innovators to take on new behaviors without undue risk and allows others to watch and begin to model their own changes on the basis of their observation of the demonstration. The trial begins with a participative process of using the assembled resources at hand to choose and shape the change. It goes on to develop and then implement a plan.

Extend

Once a successful or partially successful trial has been completed, the next step is to extend the acceptance and adoption of the new program throughout the system. Here marketing and salesmanship come into play. The change team should include opinion leaders as well as innovators, and the process should take account of the interest level and questions that might concern later adopters.

Renew

The last stage is not so much a step as a restart. Once we have demonstrated a successful change process, how do we instill the motivation and the understandings to create a continuing process within the system? How do we sustain commitment? How do we keep the change process fresh and relevant? This is the true meaning of renewal.

Knowledge Base

Why a Stepwise Model of Problem Solving and Why These Steps?

That problem-solving cycles are inherent and ubiquitous in animal and human behavior has been universally accepted by biologists for more than a century. All psychological research on learning processes, despite wide differences in methods and outlook, accepts some sort of need-stimulus-response-need reduction cycle as basic. Original credit for applying these ideas in the realm of social behavior is hard to assign, but special mention should go to gestalt psychologist Kurt Lewin (1951). He empirically demonstrated many of his field-theory concepts, including unfreezing-moving-refreezing and the importance of information gatekeepers, through a series of ingenious small-group experiments in the early 1940s.

The specific formulation of stages in *Guiding Change* dates to Havelock (1970). He started with a model derived from Lippitt, a student of Lewin (Lippitt, Watson, & Westley, 1958). Havelock sought preliminary validation of the model by soliciting detailed critiques of a draft document from a sample of 115 educators from across the United States. He used their responses to shape the final product. Many others developed similar formulations in subsequent years. For example, Kotter (1996), focusing on leadership for change in business organizations, proposes "eight steps to transforming your organization": (1) establishing a sense of urgency, (2) forming a powerful guiding coalition, (3) creating a vision, (4) communicating the vision, (5) empowering others to act on the vision, (6) planning for and creating short-term wins, (7) consolidating improvements and producing still more change, and (8) institutionalizing new approaches. Kotter and Cohen (2002) have since bolstered the model with empirical studies of how it worked in more than 100 business organizations.

Fullan, a leading synthesizer of educational research on change and innovation (1982, 2001b), notes "a recent remarkable convergence of theories, knowledge bases, ideas, and strategies" around five components of effective leadership: moral purpose, understanding change, relationship building, knowledge creation and sharing, and coherence making (2001a, p. 3). The correspondence between his five elements and the seven CREATER stages proposed here is obvious and will be referred to again as knowledge boxes are presented for successive stages. Fullan also references Kotter but characterizes his approach as top-down. Fullan, it should be added, is ambivalent about using stage models and giving advice on strategies, noting that "change cannot be managed. It can be understood and perhaps led, but it cannot be controlled" (2001a, p. 33).

Where Do Change Agents Fit in a Change Process?

Regardless of their formal job titles and official positions, people can adopt four primary roles as change agents: catalyst, solution giver, process helper, and people-resource linker.

Four Ways to Be a Change Agent

- Catalyst
- Solution giver
- Process helper
- People-resource linker

The Change Agent as Catalyst

Some people play a useful role in the change process by prodding and pressuring the system to be less complacent and to start working on its serious

problems. In education today, this role is often taken by students, concerned parents, or school board members. They do not necessarily have the answers, but they make their concerns loudly known. They upset the status quo. Because they energize the process without necessarily providing the best solutions, we call them catalysts.

The Change Agent as Solution Giver

Many people who want to bring about change have definite ideas about what the change should be. They have solutions and they want others to adopt those solutions. Sometimes their commitment to their solution gets in the way of understanding the real problem or understanding resistance to the solution they advocate. By emphasizing process and not content, *Guiding Change* does not give solutions, but it should be useful to solution givers who want to become more effective. Committed innovation advocates can play a constructive role in the change process, making people aware of new ideas and stirring up interest in the possibilities of change. Being an effective solution giver involves more than simply having a solution. It means knowing how the solution relates to people's needs and concerns. Change agents must be prepared to adapt themselves and their innovations to satisfy those concerns.

> When counselor Peters turned to the cooperative discipline program, she locked onto one solution, advocating, persuading, and doing much of the detailed implementation work herself. We know that several teachers rejected the program from the outset, but Peters elected to move ahead anyway. She could have looked for alternatives that would have satisfied the legitimate concerns of these teachers about disrupted routines and the level of effort required. She could also have worked more with the teachers to adapt and perhaps downsize the innovative program. This overcommitment to a single approach put her in a painful and vulnerable position when things went awry.

The Change Agent as Process Helper

The process helper assists the system primarily through building relationships and helping members of a system define problems for themselves in their own terms. It is a complicated role that is not always understood or appreciated by those who are committed to a particular course of action. The process helper is always saying, "Wait a minute; isn't there some other aspect we should consider?" or "Aren't there some other people who should be involved in this?"

> Ms. Peters started out as a process helper, listening to teachers and parents, forming working groups, and coordinating with the principal. As it turned out, however, she had not done enough to bring either key parents or the principal into the process.

The Change Agent as People-Resource Linker

Effective problem solving requires making all kinds of new connections. Some of these are people-to-people connections within the school. Some are

connections between members of the system and outsiders: experts, state and local officials, researchers, teachers, and other experienced innovators in other school districts. Mental connections also have to be made between problems and solutions, needs and resources. Because making connections is such a crucial aspect of the change process, a central role can be played by the linker, who specializes in making these connections. The linker brings others together both within the system and between the system and the outside. The linker also connects people to resources and helps them make the mental connections between needs and potential solutions. The linker should also understand processes and help in every phase of problem solving, sometimes as a catalyst or a solution giver and always as a process helper.

A Case to Ponder: What Role Did Ms. Peters Really Play?

Much of the time, Ms. Peters seemed to play the role of a linker, sometimes to good effect, sometimes not. As the school counselor, she had the freedom to act and to relate to different members of the system. Whereas Mrs. Byron could not manage any contact with Jay's parents, Ms. Peters could call them into the school for a meeting. Ms. Peters also attended the teacher conference and, as a result, better understood the connection between the problems of the school and what the cooperative discipline program offered. She connected with teachers on several levels, reaching out to explain the program, providing model lessons, modeling some of the new behaviors required, and preparing posters. In doing all these things, she exemplified the role of linking agent.

Knowledge Base

Why Do We Need Change Agents?

Research studies consistently suggest that although knowledge use is always local (McLaughlin, 1990; Fullan & Miles, 1992), it requires well-developed materials and external linkages and supports (Louis, Kell, Dentler, Corwin, & Herriott, 1984). Findings from multisite studies of school change indicate that successful change efforts benefit from support from outsiders who provide pragmatic, comprehensive, and ongoing linkages between researchers and practitioners (Louis & Rosenblum, 1981; Turnbull, 1981; Sashkin & Egermeier, 1993).

Cox and Havelock (1982) found that linking agents in various guises played a key role in successful innovation in a large nationwide study of federal efforts to improve educational practice. Likewise, Huberman and Miles (1984), in perhaps the most intensive and sophisticated study of the innovation process ever undertaken, looked at 12 projects in 12 dispersed field sites. They found that sustained assistance at every stage was essential for success, and especially important in later stages, "substantially increasing the levels of commitment and practice mastery" (p. 273). Several research studies have stressed the value of high-quality, ongoing human assistance at all points in the change process: problem identification, problem solving, implementation, and institutionalization (Crandall & Loucks, 1983; Hall & Hord, 1987; Louis & Miles, 1990).

(Continued)

Kim Grose (in Rust & Freidus, 2001) describes her recent success in developing a cadre of outside change facilitators, starting from a pool of volunteers who had no prior substantive experience in education but were chosen "for their commitment to children, a track record of leadership and involvement in their communities and strong communication and interpersonal skills." These Partners in School Innovation went on to provide substantial support for innovation in seven San Francisco Bay Area schools.

Why Linking Agents in Particular?

Empirical support for the importance of the change agent as knowledge linker was first reported by Sieber and colleagues (1972), who studied a pilot program to train and install linkers in state education agencies in three states. They concluded that the role was successful but too expensive a model to be supportable as a permanent, nationwide element.

Most recently, the value of such a role in special education has been fully demonstrated by Hamilton and colleagues (2002, pp. I–8) in a project that recruited, trained, and deployed linkers in 58 local education agencies in 28 states.

The C-R-E-A-T-E-R Process Checklist

Take a few minutes to think about your school setting as it relates to each of the seven stages. Try to formulate a tentative answer to each of the following questions.

C   *Care.* Is the system actively concerned about improvement?

R   *Relate.* Do cooperative relationships exist among key players within the system which allow a sustained change effort?

E   *Examine.* Has the system clearly defined its needs as solvable problems?

A   *Acquire.* Has the system made a real effort to find alternative solutions?

T   *Try.* Has the system made a commitment to try out new approaches?

E   *Extend.* Has the system tried to spread the change effort to a wider circle of users?

R   *Renew.* Has the system taken steps to ensure the survival of changes made and to develop an internal process to continue innovating?

Successful change ultimately requires positive answers to all these questions. At the beginning, the minimum requirement is a partial yes to Stages 1 and 2. Some members of the system must care about making changes, and some sort of network of relations must be in place to support a new effort. That network must obviously be one to which the linker can connect directly.