

In press: Year 2001 special edition of *Journal of Negro Education* called, "School Reform Movement and the Education of African-American Youth: A Retrospective, Update, and Critical Analysis."

National Urban Alliance Professional Development for Improving Achievement in the Context of Effective Schools Research

Daniel U. Levine, Eric J. Cooper, Asa Hilliard III

CONCLUSION

Ultimately the challenge facing those interested in eliminating the achievement gap between children of color and other children requires sustained and cohesive professional development for the educators serving the children. This will require that districts revisit what has been identified as a rather dismal track record for conducting in-service training or staff development (Allington, Cunningham, 1996). Traditional staff development approaches by districts, such as, one-shot workshops, sporadic in-service training which is highlighted by a "superintendent's day," workshop-type presentations conducted during stolen moments of a faculty meeting, staff retreats, after-school training, or even the establishment of a district-based professional development center, which provides a filter for introducing teachers to "new" ideas, have provided little evidence of success.

What we have attempted to do within this article is to illustrate the complexity of implementing successful professional development interventions. Each of the research-based processes previously outlined is designed to provide a framework that can incorporate district-based interventions. It is not that traditional approaches to staff development or in-service training are inappropriate, it is that they may not provide a framework for developing the level of sustained change and cohesion required for significant achievement gains. Educational change begins with, among other things, a dialogue, and a careful review of the various reform practices chosen by central and school-based educators. Questions need to be answered regarding the broad theoretical and pedagogical principles common to each, and change overload for participating schools must be avoided (Fullan, 1991; Levine & Cooper, 1991; Allington & Cunningham, 1996). All too often NUA representatives have observed educators who some have called, "change junkies," i.e., those who utilize a checklist approach to school change, and who feel that as long as they are able to point to reform programs underway achievement.

Hopefully, what we have also accomplished in this article is to point out the complex nature of change and what is required for system-wide improvement. The process requires enormous commitment, leadership (both within and outside the school-district), adherence to those prerequisites of successful programmatic implementation identified above, and sufficient time for interventions to take-hold at the school and central levels. If we are to see the elimination of the achievement gap between children of color and other students, nothing less than a total commitment to this goal by all stakeholders in school communities, state departments of education, and the federal government will suffice. Somehow the politics of educational change have to be minimized, so that the primary focus of educational reform is driven by the refrain: "what is best for all the children, and what evidence supports the intervention." Implemented correctly, effective school and cognitive research can support that goal.