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Staff Development

The End of an Era of Staff Development

Staff development should not place teachers in a passive learning role but should encompass a broad range of professional growth opportunities.

We have come to the end of an era. Staff development as we have known it has proven ineffective and limiting. To usher in a new era, we need a new vision of staff development—one that challenges and involves teachers in the honoring and creation of their own knowledge.

The Beginning of the Era

The present era of staff development began more than 15 years ago when we began to see the teacher as an adult learner. This "revolutionary" insight coincided with an increase in knowledge about adult learning (Lambert 1983). We learned that cognitive development does not peak in late adolescence, plateau, and then decline. Indeed, cognitive complexity continues to develop—or has the potential to do so—throughout one's life, even into late adulthood (Sprinthall and Thies-Sprinthall 1983).

We realized then that teachers had not necessarily given the best years of their lives to preservice. There was hope for a lifetime of learning on the job. Therefore, our modest attempts at inservice—one-shot inspirational speakers or an occasional conference in subject matter—fell far short of addressing our needs for systematic learning about teaching.

So *inservice* gave way to *staff development*. As excellent teachers, we sought this challenge. We became expert in skills we could teach to our colleagues. We became the new breed of trainers: staff developers. Lacking an articulated knowledge base of our own, we turned to research for answers to our questions: What is good teaching? What does it look like? How do we know when we're doing it? Can we teach it to others? Can we model it for others?

Enter stage left, Madeline Hunter (1979), followed by David Berliner (1984). We listened. What we heard rang true: there are effective elements of good instruction. As teachers, we had known that. Now we had our knowledge base—at least our first important piece of it. Our new knowledge also gave us direction in how to deliver this information to adults. After all, good instruction is good instruction. Armed with our discrete skills and training manuals, we forged ahead.

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Enter stage right, Bruce Joyce and this thing called "coaching" (Joyce and Showers 1983). Joyce told us that if skills are to be tranferred to the classroom, there must be more than telling and showing. We needed modeling, practice, and feedback. Again, this made sense.

By the late '70s we were defining staff development as learning about a new skill and transferring that skill to the classroom. Thus we had our premiere model for staff development (Joyce and Showers 1980):

- presentation of theory,
- demonstration of skill,
- protected practice,
- practice,
- feedback,
- coaching.

In most quarters, this definition still stands today (California Study of Staff Development 1987, ASCD 1985).

Direct Instruction Drawbacks

Meanwhile, our investigation of "effective schools"—elementary schools successful with low-ability students as measured by standardized tests—confirmed the work of Hunter and Berliner:

the most successful schools used more direct instruction.

In the more-than-10 years since the effective schools movement began, however, we have learned some disturbing things about this model of instruction:

- With direct instruction, students tend to do slightly better on achievement tests initially but do slightly worse on tests of abstract thinking, creativity, and problem solving (Peterson 1979, Glickman 1979).
- Students with an internal locus of control who take responsibility for their own learning do worse with direct instruction, while students with an external locus of control do better (Wright and DeCetter 1976).
- High-achieving, task-oriented students do worse in direct instruction than in less direct approaches (Ebmeier and Good 1979, Solomon and Kendall 1976).
- After three years of predominant use of direct instruction, achievement scores plateau and begin to decline (Robbins and Wolfe 1987).

Similar findings have been reported around the country (Robbins 1987, Stallings 1987). These findings raise serious doubts about direct instruction for children. Of course, direct instruction still has an important role to play in the classroom; but if it is the centerpiece of the learning experience, it gets in the way of human development.

Yet, despite our knowledge of the drawbacks of direct instruction, the premiere model of staff development for adults is in many ways *parallel to the direct instruction model for students* (see fig. 1).

This preferred staff development approach reflects many misconceptions about adult learning:

- Adult learning is an *outside-in* rather than an *inside-out* process.
- Teachers as learners are conduits; they do not perceive, translate, or construct knowledge.
- Changes in discrete behaviors will improve decision making and thereby enable teachers to make continuous and informed decisions as they teach.
- Craft knowledge and experience are not necessarily valid.
- Choice is limited by indisputable research about "right" practice.
- Growth and development occur solely as functions of pedagogical practices.

Fig. 1. Parallels Between Staff Development and Direct Instruction

Direct Instruction Model	Staff Development Model
input	presentation of theory
modeling	demonstration
guided practice	protected practice
independent practice	practice
more guided practice	feedback and coaching

Why have these false assumptions endured so long? If we eagerly accepted the new knowledge about adult learning, why did we adopt a model whose assumptions deny the most basic tenets of adult learning? The reason, I believe, is that staff development has been nestled in the promise of collegiality.

The Lure of Collegiality

The merits of collegiality have been well established (Bird and Little 1983, Little 1982, Lieberman 1982, Kent 1985, McNergney and Carrier 1981, Zahorik 1987). Collegial practice expands cognitive complexity, leads to thoughtful planning and reflective practice, and increases teachers' satisfaction with their work.

Teachers consistently report that the power and attraction of staff development lies in the opportunity to talk to other teachers (George 1986). "Collegiality" was seductive and satisfying to teachers; the more we could make it happen, the more pleased we were with our staff development activities. We conspired with our colleagues in the passive process of receiving knowledge. Technical coaching became a collegial practice for "oiling" the pipeline of passivity. If the new learning wasn't a "take," we pointed the finger at the lack of practice and coaching (Robbins and Wolfe 1987). We began to speculate about the vast number of trials needed for transfer of a new skill to occur. If we would just tell teachers more and longer, we believed, they'd finally learn the new skill. We didn't question the "telling."

In playing a passive role in staff development, teachers failed to take charge of their own profession. And we staff developers unwittingly colluded with arthritic bureaucracies to keep teachers from questioning and demanding more of the system. We have not challenged teachers to inquire, criticize, participate, or create. Instead, we have perpetuated the paternalistic system that reinforces schooling-as-usual: we have taught teachers to accept the system as it is, concede that

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valid knowledge lies outside their day-to-day world, and focus exclusively on the students (without balanced attention to developing oneself, one's colleagues, and the profession).

Involving the Learner

If we acknowledge the inadequacies of the era of staff development in which the learner is the recipient of expert knowledge, what must we do to usher in a new era? We must redesign staff development to involve and empower the learner. Because we have insisted on "telling" teachers how to improve, the staff development community has had limited influence on the profession. Instead of persisting in this error, we should encourage teachers to do what they have not done:

- talk about their own thinking and teaching, instead of just about materials, discipline, activities, and individualization for students;
- initiate change in the school environment;
- contribute to the knowledge base of the profession;
- enculturate new teachers in the positive-practice and self-directing norms of teaching;
- share in the leadership of schools;
- foster teachers' union commitment to improving the profession, especially at the local level;
- help to design the restructuring of schooling;
- design new or expanded roles for themselves;
- actively and cooperatively improve the societal image of teaching as a profession.

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Opportunities to Learn

When teachers engage in reflective practice, collegiality, and shared leadership, they come to understand themselves and their work differently. This new understanding causes a shift in their beliefs and norms. This shift, in turn, creates new opportunities, new visions of what can be done. The new professional development is a cultural, not a delivery, concept.

This cycle of professional development requires taking advantage of the rich and varied opportunities to learn that are available in schools. These opportunities are numerous: when teachers participate in decisions, redefine their roles, reflect on their own competence, converse with peers, advocate new programs or schedules, pose questions about their work, or give guidance to new teachers, thereby eliciting and articulating their own knowledge.

Such a view incorporates the dimensions of empowerment: options, choice, authority, and responsibility (Freire 1970, Champeux 1984, Lambert 1983, Lightfoot 1987, Benveniste 1987, Marshall 1985). These emancipatory elements are described below.

Options. Awareness that options exist—in roles, tasks, career, use of time, relationships, strategies, curriculum—unleashes a sense of liberation or personal power in the individual.

Choice. Awareness of options must be accompanied by the freedom to choose among them; a teacher has no options without the power of choice. By exercising choice, teachers move from a passive to an active role. However, one choice may be the conscious decision not to exercise an option.

Authority. Teachers who take an active role need authority both inside and outside the classroom. They need to share in power and leadership. The sharing of authority means the sharing of responsibility. It also means redefining the role of the teacher.

Responsibility. Professional development means developing the profession as well as oneself. Each teacher is responsible for contributing to the redesign of schooling to better meet the needs of all concerned, sharing in the enculturation of new teachers, and contributing to the knowledge base of the profession.

District Actions

In a professional environment that highly values these empowering elements, teachers engage in a broad range of professional growth opportunities. Many school districts in Marin County, California, for example, are dedicated to developing inquiring systems. Over the past four years, these districts have refocused decision-making authority and the source of knowledge about teaching by:

- working with schools and staffs to schedule time for teachers to work together;
- providing clerical, para-professional, and technological support for teachers;
- providing discretionary funds for innovation, experimentation, and research—and providing teachers with authority over the use of those funds;
- supporting teacher-designed and district-designed roles—researcher, advisor, university liaison, curriculum specialist, leadership team member—to expand areas of expertise and extend authority;
- eliminating exclusive reliance on administrative judgments and assisting and promoting teacher self-evaluation;
- seeking and insisting on nonconfrontational bargaining to engender "win-win" working relationships;
- sharing decisions at all levels with staff—virtually eliminating distrust and incapacity to act;

We have not challenged teachers to inquire, criticize, participate, or create.

- providing ombudsman services by teacher leaders to other districts, universities, professional organizations, the state department, and business;
- removing unnecessary bureaucratic rules such as policies that centralize all decisions on resources.

A New Role for Staff Developers

If teachers become proactive participants who assume responsibility for professionalizing teaching, will the staff developer—as well as staff development—become obsolete? Absolutely not! In this new vision of staff development, the staff developer and the principal become "systems facilitators," with additional skills and additional functions. The new staff developer will assist professionals to:

- inquire into and reflect upon practice,
- elicit and share craft knowledge,
- identify and create options for learning,
- lead and work collaboratively,
- learn about new developments in the profession,
- design school and district systems that open opportunities and encourage participation.

A New Social Contract

Can we as staff developers enter into a new social contract with our professional peers? I believe we can, because of the changes we have already made. We have created roles for ourselves, we have assumed authority over a new realm, we have taken responsibility for an ever-widening arena of adult learning activities, we have talked among ourselves and sought information when and where we needed it. We have become smarter . . . and wiser. From the vantage of our own engagement with multiple opportunities for learning, can we now do less with others?□

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