

How Do We Get There from Here?

CERYLLE MOFFETT

There is a large suburban high school I know where teachers still plan and teach—alone. In this school, as in many others, the pressures of external accountability demands and the scarcity of financial and human resources leave few opportunities for these teachers to share craft knowledge, engage in professional inquiry, observe their colleagues' teaching, or experiment with new instructional practices. No mentoring program exists for new faculty. Staff development is still referred to as "inservice," and programs by outside experts are rarely supported by practice, feedback, and coaching.

The culture of this school does not reflect the "emancipatory elements" Lambert suggests are integral to a professional working environment for teachers: options, choice, authority, and responsibility. How, then, do we make Lambert's vision a reality in our schools? How do we get *there* from *here*?

I contend that skills training in research-based teaching strategies conducted by outside experts—which Lambert suggests is retarding the growth of teaching as a profession—has actually equipped us with the tools we need to build the school culture that she envisions. By offering teachers and administrators training in such innovations as TESA, cooperative learning, learning styles, and mastery teaching, staff developers have helped devise a *common vocabulary* for describing effective instruction, a *repertoire* for teacher choice, and the capacity to build a culture in schools based on a *solid core of professional knowledge and skill*. The function of professional development activities is twofold: to enhance professional knowledge and skills through training and to promote a culture of dialogue that supports experimentation and reflection on practice.

Few would argue with Lambert's view of the limits of the direct instruc-

tion model for teaching teachers—if that were the sole model used. Recognizing the importance of the knowledge that teachers construct from classroom experience is critical. However, much depends on the context—time, urgency, and existing skill levels (Brandt 1989)—on participants' levels of cognitive and career development, and on the degree to which they are committed to their own professional growth and improvement.

In examining the issues Lambert raises, it is useful to distinguish among:

- the use of direct instruction in staff development sessions where the concepts and skills are new to the learners;
- the use of a repertoire of eliciting, interactive, and experiential training strategies in situations where the content is an extension of the learners' present knowledge and skills;
- the appropriate use of prescriptive feedback (advice and suggestions)

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and nonprescriptive feedback (encouraging reflective analysis and critical inquiry) in coaching, supervision, and instructional problem solving.

One of the most exciting aspects of professional development today is the growing repertoire of training and supervisory strategies staff developers command. Fifteen years ago, who would have imagined distinguishing between such concepts as *technical coaching* and *cognitive coaching*? Who would have predicted the rich repertoire of training strategies staff developers now use—jigsaw, simulation, peer problem solving, experiential and team learning—that enable us to *elicit* content as well as to *present* content?

Lambert is correct: we *are* at the end of an era in staff development. But there is a continuum operating here, one that includes our growing knowledge of research, of best practice in staff development, and of appropriate organizational structures for schools.

Some schools—like the one in my neighborhood and perhaps in yours—are near the beginning of the continuum. Others are farther along. And a few, like those in Rochester, New York, and Louisville, Kentucky, are engaged in bold new ventures that are leading us toward school structures we have only begun to imagine. Lambert's vision of the professional culture that must pervade the school of the future challenges us to apply our new repertoire of skills and to set our sights beyond the present moment. □

Reference

- Brandt, R. (April 12, 1989). Concluding remarks at ASCD National Curriculum Study Institute, "Organizing and Implementing Effective Staff Development Programs," Charleston, South Carolina.

Cerylle Moffett is a Staff Development Specialist, ASCD.

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