

Follow Up

TEACHER CENTERS DON'T HAVE TO BE EDSLS

In "The Way I See It" (October 1982) Sarah Caldwell sketched what she considered failings of teacher centers and suggested ways that centers could become more actively involved in improving schools. According to Caldwell, teacher centers have focused on professional development needs of individual teachers instead of focusing on school-based needs. Our teacher center experience does not support Caldwell's position, and we'd like to set the record straight, correct inaccuracies, and provide additional thoughts to give a more balanced view of teacher centers and the role they play.

In discussing teacher centers supported by the U.S. Department of Education Teacher Center Program, Caldwell asserts that "many" leaders of these centers moved toward "adversary relationships with the 'establishment,' the administration." All of these centers were governed by policy boards that included administrators; all were funded by proposals that administrators signed as representatives of local boards of education. Obviously, these centers were partners to, not adversaries of, administrative goals and objectives.

Caldwell also writes that teacher centers have ignored what she terms "mandates" implied in "the literature." We don't know what literature she means since there are no citations, and it's unclear if the "mandates" are supported by evidence or a general body of opinion about the way staff development/school improvement should proceed. Her "mandates" may be correct, but she is incorrect in stating that teacher centers ignore them. Let's consider each "mandate" in turn.

1. "The school, not the teacher, is the unit for change. . . . Centering on individual teacher needs, in absence of an institutional focus, is a fragmented effort that has little effect on school renewal." We would not disagree that the school is the most logical unit for focusing educational change efforts; however, we must remember that this is a hypothesis that needs verification. Educators have examples of both un-

successful school-based change efforts and successful teacher center work with a cadre of teachers within a school.

2. "The principal is the key to instructional improvement. The principal sets the tone for the school's climate, which views staff development as a logical process through which to engage in both school improvement and personal/professional growth." We too believe in the importance of the principal's role. However, the principal's stance may be supportive of staff development as Caldwell suggests or it may not. All staff developers must be aware of the diversity among principals in providing leadership for school improvement. Quite often school improvement does not begin at the school level but with key individuals in the school.

3. "The climate of a healthy school is one in which school improvement is developmental rather than remedial, the staff systematically engages in self-study, and inservice is one means of helping the staff 'get where they have mutually agreed to go.'" The relationships among climate, healthy school, and systematic self-study are not clear. What is a healthy school? How does it relate to teacher centers? One point does emerge with clarity from this "mandate": the implication that teacher centers engage in remedial rather than developmental work. If this is what Caldwell intended to imply, it comes as a surprise to all who know the teacher center movement as being closely associated with developmental education.

According to Caldwell, teacher centers have established a false dichotomy of school improvement vs. individual growth. She contends that "many teacher centers 'zeroed in' on the individual teacher and became preoccupied with issues of teacher governance and control." Not only does she not indicate actual instances that support her premise, she also does not clarify how working with individual teachers results in a preoccupation with governance issues. Of the more than 120 federally funded centers, we can identify no more than a dozen that could be characterized as being preoccupied with governance issues; the actual number may be smaller

depending on how Caldwell defines "preoccupied."

As for the "false dichotomy," we feel it is not only false; it doesn't exist. Each of our centers engages in school improvement efforts while working with individual teachers. Other centers do the same. Research on a center in Ventura, California, engaged in individual and school-based efforts concludes that the needs of individual teachers are of a different type than are the needs of the entire staff (Copeland, Everhart, and Kingsford, 1981). The Ventura research team (not center staff members) also concludes that successful building-wide improvements require addressing the needs of individual staff members.

The Teachers' Learning Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico, supports local board of education goals aimed at community involvement and instructional excellence through special programs, one-to-one advisory work, and linking school staff members with appropriate resources. The Center also sponsors a minigrant program to respond to particular needs of individual teachers and buildings.

The St. Louis Metropolitan Teacher Center, through inservice and small educational grants made available to principals, teachers, and others, addresses personal professional development and schoolwide needs (Mosher, 1981). Center staff also serve as facilitators for the Kettering (I/D/E/A) Principals Inservice Program that focuses on personal professional development, school improvement, and a collegial support framework.

The New York City Teacher Center Consortium's building-based program serves 32 school districts. It addresses mastery learning and teaching, training for special education teachers, training for computer-assisted instruction, and implementing research for effective teaching. The center director and superintendent meet periodically to discuss system goals and how the center may address them.

Similar programs and services are provided by the Oak Ridge Teacher Center, the Western Nebraska Rural Teacher Center, the Knoxville City/Knox County Teacher Center, and the Area Education Agency 7 Teacher Cen-

ter (Iowa), all but one of which are part of the National Teacher Center Program.

Although Caldwell says that "many teacher centers are closing their doors," our evidence suggests that most federal centers are continuing. A Far West Laboratory study found that of nine federally funded teacher centers in their three-state region, seven are now supported through local means. The U.S. Department of Education cites a continuation level of about 94 percent among centers funded under PL 94-482 since 1978. Not only do centers appear to be needed, it appears that local funds are being used to continue them.

References

Copeland, W.; Everhart, R.; and Kingsford, S. *Helping Schools Plan Staff Development: A Study of an Approach to Inservice Education*. San Francisco: Research on Experienced Teacher Centers, Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 1981.

Mosher, G. W. *Individual and Systemic Changes Mediated by a Small Educational Grant Program*. San Francisco: Research on Experienced Teacher Centers, Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 1981.

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Sarah Caldwell replies:

We seem to agree in principle on some points:

1. Some teacher center directors have made commendable efforts to integrate their centers into the organization change process in order to meet school and systemwide needs as well as address

individual teacher concerns.

2. The school is the logical unit for focusing change efforts.

3. The principal's role is important.

4. Staff development efforts are "developmental," not remedial.

We seem to disagree in three areas. First, *school goals and individual needs*. Mosher and the others appear to believe that while school-level goals are important, determination of needs and program planning can be independent of organizational needs and still be effective in improving schools. I know of no literature—either opinion or research—that supports this view. It is nearly impossible to have long-term impact when teachers' perceived personal and professional needs are dealt with in isolation. At the opposite extreme, identification of needs solely at the district level also bypasses the organizational change process. This approach brought about the need for teacher centers in the first place.

Perhaps teacher centers should be more proactive in establishing their role in school-level goal determination. An active role in the goal-setting process may answer the question, "How does the teacher center relate to organizational climate in a healthy school?"

Second, *the principal's role*. The center directors believe the principal is important and can support staff development, but they also suggest that where principals are not supportive, school improvement can begin with key individuals in the school and be effective. True, ideas for change can *begin* with staff, but I know of no significant improvement program accomplished without the support of the principal. The single teacher who attends an inservice may benefit, be enthusiastic, grow from the experience, but it is difficult if not impossible to sustain that personal impact over time. The support for "back in the classroom" must come from other staff members at the school, primarily the principal.

As these teacher center directors must know from experience, placing administrator representatives on a policy board doesn't automatically produce the level of commitment and support needed from school principals. Unless there is a

concerted effort by policy board members to involve principals, principals may not think of the teacher center as a logical resource for school improvement. The implication for teacher centers is to fully incorporate principals into a leadership role in the needs assessment and long-range staff development planning for their schools.

Third, "*mandates*"—*evidence or opinion?* The model described by Wood and others in "Practitioners and Professors Agree on Effective Staff Development Practices" (*Educational Leadership*, October 1982) provides compelling support for these views. More evidence for effective staff development practices can be found in the 1981 ASCD Yearbook, *Staff Development/Organization Development*. At least three decades of research support the school-as-the-unit-of-change idea, organization development practices, and the role of the principal in school improvement. Some of the major sources of research are the Rand study by Berman and McLaughlin, John Goodlad's *Dynamics of Organizational Change* (McGraw-Hill, 1975), and the "effective schools" research produced by Ron Edmonds and others at Michigan State University.

Teacher centers, as well as other staff development programs, can and should emphasize school improvement. This does not imply ignoring the individual. It may, however, require a shift in approach. □

1C. V. Bunderson, B. Baillio, J. B. Olsen, with J. I. Lipson and K. M. Fisher, "Instructional Effectiveness of an Intelligent Videodisc in Biology," *Machine-Mediated Learning*, forthcoming.

ELITIST INTENSITY

I am appalled! I read and re-read "Teacher Growth States and School Environments" by Bruce Joyce and Michael McKibbin (November 1982) trying to overcome my initial impression, but "Philby" and "Mary Anne" are still all too prominent in my mind. I can't erase the message that seems to be flagged by their comparison: a teacher who graduated from "... a leading urban university ..." is a far superior

teacher to the "... child of migrant fruit pickers ..." who graduated from a state college.

Are we to generalize from this and select our teachers only from "leading urban universities"? Should we assume that children of migrant workers, who change schools frequently, make poor teachers? If not, what was the point?

I perceive an elitist, discriminatory tone from this small segment of an otherwise meaningful article. I'm almost surprised that Philby's race and creed weren't mentioned. Fortunately, my 20 years in education permit me to comfortably reject the implied messages. I know "good" teachers that come from all types of backgrounds and all types of schools. (Bad ones can come from anywhere, also.)

The insensitivity of the authors would compel me to rank them right there with Matilda as far as being undesirable on my faculty. I still believe the American Dream applies to that child of a migrant fruit picker as much as anyone else.

RICHARD C. TUCKER
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Bruce Joyce replies:

We certainly did not intend to create the impression that Mr. Tucker drew from our article on the growth states of teachers. We believe, as he does, that growing people have all manner of backgrounds and experiences. These two teachers are specific cases, and no generalization was intended. By the way, the portions of the study that we reported in the article did not include an analysis of "good teaching."

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