

# to Lambert

## Staff Development Is Alive and Well

GUY BLACKBURN

Linda Lambert has decided to preside at the funeral of staff development when, in much of the country, staff development is in its infancy.

Staff development is not something that can be applauded or condemned out of hand; it is a service function within an organization. As such, it is likely to be as effective as the organization is healthy. Obviously, any effort to improve skills and increase knowledge can range from very effective to disastrous depending on organizational realities, topics, the efficacy of trainers, and other situational conditions.

Efforts to improve the health of an organization are known as organizational development, not staff development. Herein lies Lambert's greatest confusion. Many of the solutions she generates focus on organizational change. Staff development plays a relatively minor role in issues of governance, decision making, and job satisfac-

tion. When school interactions are patronizing, often staff development programs are, too. But when a school develops programs that foster participation and collegiality, then the quality and appeal of those programs are enhanced. On this I am in agreement with Lambert.

Lambert's criticisms of direct instruction for students and teachers imply that some mysterious but undefined alternative is superior. Basically we get a rehash of the tired argument about whether teaching is an art or a science. Thinking educators know this is a false dichotomy; teaching has both artistic and scientific aspects. No single final answer is available to the question of how best to teach to meet all the different stages of development, degrees of knowledge, levels of motivation, and varying spheres of interest that exist in a typical classroom of 30 students. But many of the researchers cavalierly dismissed by Lambert have begun to make modest inroads into

the puzzling interactions of the teaching/learning enterprise. They have shown, for instance, that effective instruction is neither lockstep adherence to a sterile direct instructional approach nor faith in ill-defined and unstructured practices, but rather the selection and use of a repertoire of appropriate strategies by a skilled teacher.

Lambert's alternative to current staff development efforts is a collection of loosely defined ideas couched in "warm tone" words like *empowerment*. But she provides no supporting evidence that these "superior" efforts would improve instruction or enhance student achievement and attitudes.

Fortunately, despite Lambert's premature eulogy, staff development efforts in our schools will continue to help us reach our professional potential. □

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## Thriving on Diversity

BETTY DILLON-PETERSON

Lambert appears to believe that staff development faces demise because it is uni-dimensional—because it deals almost entirely with the demonstration and acquisition of a narrow range of teaching skills in a demeaning, mechanical way.

In reality, however, effective staff development is as multi-dimensional as the individuals who participate in it. It offers a wide array of options: site-based analysis of learning problems; action research led by teachers or in which they play a key role; sophisticated, individualized application of learning theory to adults; creative use of technology; empowerment of teachers to initiate new strategies or organizational structures, based on their own diagnoses of learning problems; opportunities for leadership for teachers who seek them and meaningful alternatives for those who do not; and even direct teaching purposefully pro-

vided for specific staff members for specific reasons. (Yes, sometimes the maligned direct instruction model is the best one to use—when learning time is limited, for example, or when everyone needs a common base of understanding from which to operate.)

This diversity is essential. Because teachers differ, there is no *best* way for them to learn to become more effective. Some prefer learning with others. Other teachers, while both conscientious and competent, will never become "collegial" in spite of our best efforts to convince them of the value of that kind of interchange. Yet other teachers can simply hear or read about a new technique and immediately put it into practice.

In fact, many teachers thrive within the "staff development model" that Lambert recommends. They are excited by turning research into practice,

either as individuals or in concert with colleagues. They engage enthusiastically in problem solving, and they add substantially to both our "craft" and our "science" knowledge. Their intellectual curiosity, their drive, their willingness to experiment help us all learn how to meet today's formidable educational challenges.

But, of course, this model will not work for all teachers. And it is equally inappropriate to imply, as Lambert does, that the "transitional" model is the only one presently being implemented. Staff development does and must offer many alternatives—so that we can all profit from as wide a variety of options as possible. □

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