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ABSTRACT
        Fourteen research studies were conducted on exemplary
practices in experienced teachers' centers, focusing upon specific
interests or concerns of those operating or otherwise supporting the
centers. Research was funded through small awards which would allow
teacher center practitioners to collaborate with researchers to
develop knowledge about practice in teachers' centers. The 14
projects selected for study were in 4 topic areas: (1) effects of
participation in the teachers' center programs; (2) teachers' center
program activities and emphasis; (3) decision making processes in
teachers' centers; and (4) relationship of the centers with other
staff development programs, school district activities, or the
community. An analysis and summary of the research in these areas is
discussed in terms of: (1) characteristics of participants (and
non-participants); (2) responses to individual teacher requests for
help outside the center; (3) interacting with teachers in the center;
(4) assessing teachers' concerns and needs; (5) teachers' center
relations with other key persons; and (6) teachers' centers
governance. Implications emerging from the reports that speak to
practices and principles common to many teachers' centers are
discussed. (JD)

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RESEARCH ON TEACHERS' CENTERS:
A SUMMARY OF FOURTEEN RESEARCH EFFORTS

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Some Background on Teachers' Centers in the United States.

In the late 1960s and the early 1970s about forty teachers' cen-
ters were established in this country. Several factors contributed
to the initiation and growth of these centers. Major curriculum de-
velopment efforts in the 1960s presented new curricula but did little
to prepare teachers to teach these curricula. The open education move-
ment spawned workplaces and advisory assistance in which teachers could
be helped to create, adopt, and use informal, "experiental" curriculum
materials and instructional methods tailored to their individual class-
rooms. Inservice education was increasingly criticized for lack of
teacher involvement in course design and for instruction that was ir-
relevant to teachers' daily needs. The growing influence of the teacher
unions supported the position that teachers should be actively involved
in planning their own inservice education. And as fewer new teachers
entered the profession, need for inservice was perceived to be greater
than for preservice education. All of these factors interacted and
contributed to an increase in teacher-designed or teacher-responsive
inservice education. Teachers' centers are one important example
of this change in inservice education. Some of these new centers
were based at universities, some within local districts, and a few
were independent of any formal educational authority.

Teachers' centres in England and Wales preceded the establish
ment of American teachers' centers. In the United Kingdom the
Nuffield Foundation, which supported the Science and Mathematics
Curriculum Projects, also supported teachers' groups to encourage
teacher involvement in curriculum development and "hands-on" teacher

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preparation to use the new materials. These groups became the first teachers' centres. Today there are more than 600 centres in the United Kingdom. Few British centres still focus on a single subject and almost no centers in this country do. However, the original intent of these United Kingdom centers--to encourage full participation of teachers in curriculum development at the local level--remains an important element in American teachers' centers today.

Throughout the sixties and seventies the United States Office of Education (now the Department of Education) supported new forms of teacher education. In 1971 a National Teacher Center Pilot Program was created; four pilot projects, each emphasizing a different approach, were supported. Then, in 1976, Public Law 94-482 was passed, creating the authority for federal support of teachers' centers. 61 centers were supported in the first operational year of the program (1978-79) and approximately 49 more were funded over the next three years. The Federal Teacher Centers Program is now one of the programs included in the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981. The major portion of these monies flow through state education agencies to local districts on a formula basis. Given the current widespread economic problems at the local level it is problematic how much of this block grant money will continue to be available for teachers' centers. Nonetheless, the Federal program has made important contributions to the movement. It has brought the concept of teachers' centers to the attention of thousands of educators. It has supported 110 centers that provided diverse programs for teachers. Many of these have survived, although often in modified forms, now that direct Federal

support has ended. The Federal program was an important aspect of the teachers' center movement. However, centers were operating before the Federal support began and many of these centers continue to exist today.

B. Some Ways of Defining Teachers' Centers.

In attempting to define centers, it is helpful to consider what kinds of centers exist. Sykes identified five possible functions served by teachers' centers, expanded on each, and suggested that these may represent competing views with each view having its advocates. His major functions include: (1) to reduce the gap between the growth of knowledge and the availability of that knowledge to teachers; (2) to promote social change by assisting teachers in meeting the several social-educational goals assigned to schools; (3) to improve teaching practice by providing opportunities to develop greater teaching skill and remediate identified weaknesses; (4) to promote the personal growth of teachers, a view based upon the belief that becoming a good teacher is more of a craft than a science; (5) to assist in school improvement efforts, focusing less on concerns of individual teachers and more on the cross-cutting problems of a school faculty.

Another way of categorizing teachers' centers is to examine their philosophical orientations. Feiman believes that basic differences among teachers' centers stem not so much from the organizational forms they take as from the assumptions on which these forms are built. She suggests that there are fundamental differences on which these forms are built. She suggests that are fundamental differences in beliefs

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about what teachers are like, who should control their education and
training, and how they can best be helped to improve their work.
Feiman identified three philosophical orientations undergirding
centers: (1) the behavioral type teachers' center which is designed
to improve specific teaching behaviors; (2) the humanistic center,
which focuses on creating a learning environment where teachers feel
psychologically supported within a neutral arena; and (3) the develop-
mental center, which encourages teachers "to reflect on their teaching
and to clarify and assess the assumptions which inform it".

Feiman underscores an important difference in the developmentally
oriented approach. She states that it "involves qualitative shifts in
the ways teachers organize experience in their heads, and, by implica-
tion, in their classrooms". Thus, concerns of a developmental center
dictate systematic, long-term involvement for teachers. This is a style
which contrasts with the many spontaneous, relatively short encounters
associated with humanistic centers and also with the more prescriptive
training and educational products characteristic of the behavioral-type
centers.

Because teachers' centers serve many teachers, they often represent
more than one of the five functions identified by Sykes. Similarly, a
teachers' center staff may adopt what Feiman refers to as a humanistic
approach for some teachers, a developmental approach that includes
humanistic principles for other teachers who return to the center
frequently, and still allow for he inclusion of behaviorally oriented
programs in their schedule of activities as well. Thus, these clas-
sifications help to describe the variety of teachers' centers, but
they should not be construed as mutually exclusive concepts. Teachers'

centers are known for their diversity; no single or simple definition is likely to define even a few centers.

C. The Teachers' Centers Exchange.

From 1975 through 1982, the Teachers' Centers Exchange, housed at the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, served the teachers' centers in this country by facilitating an exchange of expertise among those working in centers. This was accomplished largely by responding to individual requests for information about centers, spotlighting and circulating information, ideas, and themes related to teachers' centers, and arranging for meetings among teachers' center people and those who wish to learn about, with, and from them. The Exchange was supported by the National Institute of Education, United States Department of Education, and served teachers' centers which began with support from the United States Department of Education, centers which were supported by local school districts, centers supported by universities, and centers which were supported through private means.

D. Organization and Implementations of the Research Program.

When the National Institute of Education decided to conduct research that would focus on exemplary practices in experienced teachers' centers, they turned to the Exchange to assist them in this task, and to manage a program of Awards for Research on Experienced Teachers' Centers. The intent of the program (which began in 1979) was to provide small awards for research in which teachers' center practitioners would collaborate with researchers to develop knowledge about practice in teachers' centers. It was believed that greater access to persons in teachers' centers could

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be obtained by working through the Exchange and that the Exchange could assist centers in obtaining the services of researchers and conducting research within a relatively small budget. The research was to focus upon specific interests or concerns of those operating or otherwise supporting centers.

The Director of the research program sought the advice of teachers' centers practitioners, experienced researchers with an interest in staff development, representatives of the organized profession, staff of state education agencies, and U.S. Department of Education Teacher Centers Program staff in developing a list of suggested research topics. Four topic areas were defined:

1. Studies of the effects of participation in teachers' centers programs

2. Studies of teachers' center(s) programs.

3. Studies of decision making in teachers' centers.

4. Studies of the relationship of teachers' centers with other staff development programs, school district activities, or with the larger community.

A description of these suggested areas of research was included in the Announcement of Awards was distributed to approximately 300 people. People also learned of the availability of these awards through notification in several publications, including the Bulletin of the Teachers' Centers Exchange. The Announcement stressed that the four identified areas for research were only suggestions and applicants were encouraged to request support for research in other areas as well.

There were four rounds of competition for awards. A total of 55 proposals were received; 14 were funded. In order to obtain reviewers for the proposals three sources were tapped: the National Education

Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and the Teachers' Centers Exchange. Each of these sources nominated potential readers, and from those lists a total of 25 reviewers were selected. Their credentials included research experience and/or experience in directing or serving on the staff of teachers' centers. Applicants were informed through the Grants Announcement that reviewer assessments would be important considerations in the decision making process, but that final decisions would be made by the staff of the research program.

Reviewers were asked to comment on proposals on the basis of four criteria: (1) significance of the proposed research for teachers' centers; (2) quality of the proposed study; (3) adequacy of the site in which research will be conducted; and (4) qualifications of the proposed staff. Then reviewers were to indicate one of five categories in which they would place the proposal:

a. An outstanding proposal which should be supported above almost all others.

b. A strong proposal that should be supported if minor revisions are made.

c. A proposal of average quality that may be supported as it investigates an important topic.

d. A proposal of poor quality which should not be supported without changes.

e. A proposal which should not be funded under any condition.

All proposers were sent copies of reviewers' comments (with names deleted). This was helpful for successful proposers because they could identify areas in which they could improve their proposed research activity. More importantly, unsuccessful proposers were

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given specific information about what reviewers did not like about their proposals. In every case, these reviewer comments were accompanied by a letter indicating why the program staff had decided not to support the proposal in that Round, and (with the exception of the last Round) were given specific suggestions as to how they might improve their proposal so that it would be successful in a later Round.

In summary, four Rounds of competition were announced from April 1979 through November 1980. A total of 55 proposals were received and reviewed by field readers representing the research community, the teachers' center network, and the organized profession. 14 proposals were funded; the average amount of support was $18,200.

II. RESULTS FROM FOURTEEN RESEARCH PROJECTS: ANALYSIS AND SUMMARY

This paper briefly describes general findings from the 14 research projects. Although they could be organized in a variety of ways, I have chosen to discuss them in terms of the following general topics:

(A) Characteristics of participants (and non-participants)

(B) Responding to individual teacher requests for help outside the center

(C) Interacting with teachers in the center

(D) Teachers' center relations with other key persons

(E) Assessing teachers' concerns and needs

(F) Teachers' centers governance

Before summarizing data from the various projects, a few
words about the research methodologies employed in these studies
is necessary. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques were
used, often in a single research project. For example, in the
study undertaken at the Northwest Staff Development Center, quali-
tative techniques including clinical interviews and document analy-
ses were combined with descriptive quantitive analyses of the
characteristics of center participants. However, given the emphasis
on collaboration in these studies, it was common to employ qualita-
tive data collection techniques that incorporated a variety of per-
spectives. This was accomplished through what can be characterized
as ethnographic methodologies. These relatively indepth approaches,
while allowing the investigators to gain multiple insights into
individual teachers' centers, obviously do not allow for generaliza-
tions about teachers' centers collectively. This does not detract
from the importance of thse inquiries. These more finegrained
portraits of specific practices and types of participants in teachers'
centers can be examined alongside the picture that evolves from
surveys of policies and practices across many centers (such as the
Mertens and Yarger study included in this symposium). Both forms
of research are needed and in many ways they complement each other.
Certainly there is a need at this time for well conceived descriptive
analyses of teachers' centers practice and characteristics.

A. Characteristics of Participants.

Three of the projects examined the characteristics of teachers
who participate in centers. The centers were the Teachers' Active

Learning Center in Oakland, California, the Teacher Center, Brookline; and Project RISE in Colchester, Connecticut. There were some important differences in the data generated in these three studies. In the case of the Brookline and Oakland studies, the collaborative research teams concluded that there were no important demographic or philosophical differences between teachers who took advantage of those centers' services and activities and Brookline and Oakland teachers in general. (The one difference was that elementary school teachers tended to use both centers more than secondary school teachers). A major finding from both Oakland and Brookline is that the centers serve as an important source of information and a valued place for professional and personal growth for all types of teachers. Even when centers are characterized by a belief system or set of values as to how both children and adults best learn, they nonetheless accommodate teachers who differ in their conceptions about their own as well as their students' learnings. Further, these centers do not seem to be more attractive to any particular type of teacher as characterized by age, gender, or any other demographic data.

In Oakland, the research team interviewed frequent users of their Center in an effort to gain insights that could be used in planning. Their selected sample of teachers was drawn to approximate a cross-section of actual users (which they had documented over the years). These documentation records indicated that frequent users of the Center closely resembled a cross-section of teachers in the Oakland Public Schools in terms of such factors as age, neighborhood, ethnicity, and years of experience. The ratio of elementary to secondary school teachers who used the Center was approximately three to one.

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One of the most interesting findings in the Oakland study is how the teachers' views of teaching and learning in their classroom (as revealed in the in-depth interviews) tended to correspond with the way these teachers described changes in their own professional development. For example, an emphasis on interrelated, multiple aspects of the child was associated with a similar multi-faceted view of their own growth and development. On the other hand teachers who saw learning in the classroom to be largely a consistent and orderly coverage of subject matter, tended to speak of their own growth in terms of seeking more and more information. The Center was perceived as equally valuable by teachers having these quite different orientations. Favorable assessments of the Center appear to stem from the fact that the Center was able to accommodate these differences.

This finding underscores the responsive and individually-oriented nature of many teachers' centers including those in Oakland, Brookline, and Colchester. While staff at these Centers have the expressed goal of stimulating teachers toward more conceptually complex thinking and teaching over time, they also accept teachers' own contexts and offer immediate and practical help.

The description of "active staffing" that emerges from the research project at the Chicago Teachers' Center provides an excellent description of how experienced teachers' center staff move from a responsive posture, attending to immediate needs, to a longer-term, developmental type of interaction with teachers. This is an important contribution to the literature for it clearly illustrates how a center can be more than an ad hoc collection of individually-oriented activities.

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Unlike the Oakland study, the Brookline and Colchester studies
contrasted users of the center with non-users. Does some special
subset of teachers, recognized by certain ideological or socio-
demographic characteristics, use a center more than other groups?
The answer is apparently no. Although there are differences in
participation of secondary and elementary school teachers, on all
other characteristics participants appear quite similar, including
the ways in which they view children and curriculum. Again, it
appears that an effective center (interviewees in the three studies
uniformly stated their centers were effective) is able to accommodate
a variety of teachers. The studies do raise questions as to whether
and how centers affect teachers' attitudes and perceptions over time.

The major purpose of the study in Connecticut was to examine
the perceptions of teachers in a small sample stratified by gender,
experience, and degree of Center use. Teachers were identified as
frequent users, occasional users, or non-users. The focus of the
study was an examination of these teachers' beliefs about inservice
education generally, and the RISE (Regional Inservice Education)
Center specifically. Some basic differences were found between
those teachers who frequently participated in Center activities and
those who chose not to. This should not be interpreted as meaning
that the Center is unable to accommodate basic differences among
teachers, but rather that there were some common characteristics
of those who chose to use the Center. For example, frequent users
tended to speak of inservice education in terms of a human growth
orientation, while non-users talked about inservice education in
terms of repairing deficiency. Somewhat surprisingly, frequent

users apeared to be less satisfied with their present teaching roles and/or assignments than those who did not use the Center.

Some commonalities did emerge between users and non-users. For example, the need for control and a desire for respect permeated all interviews. The primary investigator writes: ". . . Underneath these empassioned expressions is the broader, more powerful issue of control; in one's personal developmental growth; in one's classroom/school; in one's personal life." A major theme in the findings of this investigation concerns control and teachers' feelings of power and powerlessness.

A number of contextual factors may help explain the apparent contradiction between the Brookline and Oakland studies and the Colchester study. Project RISE is a separate project serving teachers in nine small rural districts. The teachers' centers in Brookline and Oakland both were embedded in a single larger urban district. In both of these latter situations, accessibility to the center was relatively easy. One assumes that, given the resources of a large district and a large urban area, the teachers in Brookline and Oakland had the opportunity to engage in a wider variety of inservice or staff development activities. In contrast, the substantial majority of all three types of teachers in Connecticut equated curriculum development with the selection of commercial textbooks, suggesting a limited prior involvement with curriculum development.

The dissatisfaction with teaching, which appeared so prominent in the Connecticut study, may also be attributable to the research methodology employed at that site. The phenomenological methodology

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interprets situations within the subject's context. This means that
it is likely to uncover concerns that other methods of inquiry cannot
perceive.

Whether the dissatisfaction of these teachers is more related to
a set of conditions in rural eastern Connecticut or to the methodology
used is unclear, but the suggestion that highly dissatisfied teachers
would gravitate to a specific teachers' center is provocative. Among
other things, this suggests that teachers needing psychological sup-
port for their work may seek that support from a Center that exists
outside the bounds of the district with which their frustration tends
to be associated.

B. Responding to Individual Teacher Requests Outside the Center.

Two centers examined the manner in which individual teacher
requests for inservice education outside the center were provided.
These two centers were the St. Louis Metropolitan Teacher Center and
the Northwest Staff Development Cooperative in Livonia, Michigan. In
the Livonia Center individualized services included forms of assistance
that were requested directly by teachers or administrator by using a
"Request for Services" form. These forms were distributed to each of
approximately 100 schools in the seven districts served by the Center.
More than 2000 requests for some form of individualized assistance had
been received by the Center in the three years prior to the study.
The research project focused on characteristics of teachers who
requested individual services, the types of services they requested,
and their perceptions of the effects of those services. 78% percent
of those teachers interviewed indicated that they had considerable

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control over their own learning and professional development; almost 85% thought their involvement with the Center had made a substantive difference in their classroom. It is interesting to note that 83% of those interviewed indicated they intended to stay in teaching until retirement: perhaps this is a condition related to the Michigan context. Or possibly it suggests that teachers who request individualized services are more satisfied with their careers, although this is not tested. The Livonia data do not reveal what other teachers in that area intend with regard to their careers. Further research into the relationship of activities selected and certain teacher characteristics could be helpful.

Other findings in the Livonia study include the importance of a teachers' center advocate in a school building. This advocate may be a teacher, an administrator, or a specialist. Informal networking evolved among recipients of individualized services or awards from the Center when an advocate was present in the building.

The data on the popularity and impact of these awards are important. Many school districts have limited financial resources available for professional development programs. Further, there is increasingly a conception of district-sponsored staff development as synonymous with building level, school improvement efforts, and these programs have more political appeal than those which are more individually oriented. There is a very real danger then that individualized service programs will be seen as a frill. However, as the study conducted at the School Resource Network in Ventura, California demonstrated, individual teacher needs and concerns have to be attended to, as well as school-wide collective ones, or

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enthusiasm for the collective approach will quickly wane. Certainly, there will always be effective teachers who struggle to maintain their enthusiasm and competence within relatively ineffective schools. The Livonia study demonstrates the possibility of a school district supporting some form of individualized staff development with relatively little cost and effort. Most of the services provided by the Livonia Center were in the form of monetary awards that rarely exceeded $50.00. This seems a bargain price to pay for the sense of empowerment reported by teachers served by the Center.

The literature is replete with testimony that teachers are more likely to employ ideas and materials if they had a role in their development. In the St. Louis Center the research focused upon a Mini-grant Program that provided funds up to $750.00 for individual teachers to use in developing a wide variety of classroom-oriented projects. An in-depth analysis of approximately 50 mini-awards was conducted. Interviews with participants revealed several interesting findings. Teachers did make extensive use of products and ideas they developed. And they were able to develop projects that had implications going beyond the classroom to the entire building, and in some instances, the entire district. As would be expected, teachers who were given money and support reported high levels of satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment. Also not surprisingly, they developed projects anchored in the realities of their classroom and responsive to the needs and interests of their students. Perhaps most important, however, is the strong suggestion that teachers can, indeed, influence change and innovation in other classrooms, as well as their own, through projects they design at minimal costs.

One teacher, for example, developed a project that was eventually utilized by teachers throughout her district. The project was not initially intended for use by others, but it was adopted by other teachers because of the quality and utility of the final product. A brief quote from the teacher who developed this project provides some insight into the kind of pride and dedication teachers felt:

> I'm sort of, I guess what you would call an old
> fashioned teacher. When I go into something
> like this I like to approach it with some kind
> of a beginning and end in mind. And I not only
> saw the beginning and end in my own mind, but I
> say it happen in the book we drew up. It's a
> nice little packet, I think. I'll be interested
> to see if it's used; I really feel very satisfied.

C. Interacting with Teachers in the Center.

One type of interaction between staff and participants was examined in some detail at the Chicago Teachers' Center. That staff refers to the interactions as active staffing. The active staffing process is a developmental one in which four distinct phases occur. In the first phase, an emphasis is placed on developing rapport and respect, while at the same time responding to the expressed needs or concerns of the teacher. In the second phase, the staff member probes more deeply to help clarify underlying reasons for the manifest request or visit to the Center. It is during this stage that the focus for further mutual inquiry is generated. The third phase of the process moves into joint problem solving procedures in which a variety of resolution strategies are employed. Finally, there is a critical follow-through stage in which teachers' center staff are either involved in the teachers' classroom or the teachers remain

in contact with Center staff at the Center. The focus here is on specific classroom outcomes. Throughout these four phases there is an emphasis on mutual responsibility for growth. That is, the teacher increasingly has to assume responsibility for thinking critically about teaching and learning and the meaning of his or her classroom activities; the staff person has to use his or her experience to know when to pull out knowledge from that teachers' experience and when to insert new insights and challenges.

This concept of active staffing was documented through extensive observations of one staff member working with teachers. Detailed logs were kept as the primary data base for the study. Various interview and questionnaire data were also used.

At the Workshop Center for Open Education (WCOE) at City College of New York, the staff also assume a very active and sophisticated role in their interactions with teachers. However, the research in this instance used the complex physical setting of the center as the focus for inquiry. Just as active staffing leads a teacher to move beyond immediate problems to a more reflective analysis of his or her teaching, the physical setting of a center can also have a profound influence on teachers' professional thinking and decisions to change the way they work. "Interpenetration of use" and "density of setting" are terms employed to define and explain how teachers become involved in and contribute to the Center over time.

Interviews in this study revealed that participants in the Center were keenly aware of a great deal of prior activity, exploration, and thinking on the part of other teachers, which had been incorporated into the center's rich physical setting. They saw how the learning

experiences of other teachers had resulted in learning materials for their own classrooms and for the Center. These myriad resources, however, were not simply a collection of curiosities or a random display of completed work. They were invariably perceived as part of an integrated concept of how children and adults learn. As one teacher commented:

> Well, I would have to say that the atmosphere was deliberately created, organized . . . I mean, I don't think it's a haphazard approach. I think the Center does give you a visual plus a psychological thing when you walk in here. It's not just flung together.

Participants in the Center reported networks or conections between different aspects of the setting and how different persons and groups used the Center. They employed these connections to create new possibilities and uses for themselves. Through activities such as browsing, observation, and various workshops using hands-on materials, the density and richness of the setting continued to evolve. Materials and resources were not only presented in abundance but in interesting and often unexpected justaposition. The WCOE research team has provided a provocative initial inquiry into how the physical environment of a Center can stimulate the professional thinking of teachers.

A third, related study was conducted at the Philadelphia Teacher Parent Center. This Center assists teachers in constructing a variety of resources for their classrooms. The staff of the Center employ machines and tools and 'design kits to assist teachers, parents, and aides in making instructional materials and educational furniture. The research team asked a sample of center participants how the items each had produced in the Center were valued and used over time, in classrooms. They concluded that things teachers made

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in the Center were used frequently, and often for relatively long periods of time. Further, new uses for items emerged and physical settings of classrooms were transformed through the ingenuity and creativity of teachers inspired and helped by Center staff.

Teachers tended to make almost twice as many items as they had planned or anticipated when they first came to the Center. Not just the raw materials, but the physical context of the Center, and the ways in which the Center staff assisted participants, influenced teachers. Although some of the items constructed were the partici- pants original idea (18%), the great majority of participants were persuaded, either by the staff or by one of the many displays in the Center, to make something different from their original intent.

As was the case at WCOE in New York and at the Chicago Teachers' Center, the Philadelphia research project describes and validates a physical setting that is educative by design and a staff who probe beneath teachers' presenting problems. The question of how environ- mental context enhances teachers' personal and professional growth and leads to alterations in their own classrooms is an intriguing one.

D. Teachers' Centers and Other Key Persons.

One of the most important persons with whom a teacher works is the building principal. The role of the principal in making schools effec- tive has been demonstrated to be critical. Yet the relationship between teachers and principals varies widely from teacher to teacher and from one building to another. There is a common perception that there has been a reduction in the sphere of influence of principals as a result of the increase in teacher activism, especially through collective bargain- ing. One of the areas in which teachers have exerted more influence has

been their own continuing education. Since staff development has tradi-tionally been controlled by local administrators (and to some extent col-leges and universities), the teachers' center movement has the potential for further straining relationships between teachers and administrators. Thus, the study of the roles principals assume relative to teachers' centers is important.

Working with centers in Albemarle, North Carolina and Atlanta, Georgia, a collaborative research team concluded that teachers fre-quently participate in Center activities with no overt support from their principals. On the other hand, they concluded that lack of endorsement by principals can constrain teacher participation in the Centers. The perceptions of teachers about their principals' support of the Center are important, especially since it appears that in many situations principals report they are more supportive than teachers believe them to be. This suggests a more explicit role for the prin-cipal relative to centers, albeit one that respects the principal's own inservice agenda. Most principals seemed to feel the center had little to offer in service to their own agendas for teacher improve-ment. Perhaps centers should do more to interpret their programs to principals.

While principals at times are important sources of information about Center activities, this research project concluded that the most common and important source of support and endorsement is word-of-mouth among teachers. This perception is also supported by the re-search conducted at the Northwest Staff Development Cooperative. In Livonia, almost a quarter of the respondents reported that principals encouraged them to participate in Center activities, although in a

great many situations principals did not provide such support or even have knowledge of the possibilities offered by the Center.

Again, the appropriate role of principals in teachers' center activities is not clear. Certainly their unrestrained endorsement may not be what is most desirable. For example, one teacher in the Albemarle/Atlanta study reported:

> Sometimes it is the kiss of death if the principal suggests that the Teacher Center is a possible place for teacher improvement.

One might speculate that principals are a greater potential force for constraining teachers' involvement than they are for enabling it. Whatever the situation, given the critical role of principals in schooling, certainly more study is warranted in this area.

A research team in Charlotte, North Carolina collaborated in a study of how the Charlotte/Mecklenberg Teaching Learning Center (TLC) was used and supported by 85 Coordinating Teachers, each assigned to one school in the district, as a non-supervisory helper and consultant to teachers. This study reinforced previous experience that there are fundamental differences between elementary and secondary teachers' use of teachers' centers. In this specific situation, elementary school Coordinating Teachers assumed more of an advisory role in working alongside teachers on matters of curriculum and instruction, while those assigned to secondary schools saw themselves as managers and subject matter experts.

The Coordinating Teachers who assumed the advisory role tended to draw on the Center frequently to assist teachers in their buildings, while those working with secondary teachers did not. Thus, school context as well as role orientation can affect the participation of

key persons in a center. However, the study found actual teacher attendance at the Center is facilitated primarily by other teachers. This investigation illustrates the myriad relationships that can exist between a center and other agencies within a district. In this particular situation, if the Center were to attempt to make its services more attractive to the secondary school Coordinating Teachers (and secondary school teachers), it might run the risk of compromising its attractiveness to the elementary school Coordinating Teachers. Because other centers report that they are able to attract and satisfy a considerable variety of teachers, more investigation may be needed to identify the actual constraints to fuller participation by the Charlotte secondary school teachers.

Another research project that speaks to this topic was conducted at the Education Resource Center in Chicago. That Center exists independently of any public school system and serves not only teachers but other members of the community as well. Their research investigated costs and benefits of being an independent community organization. Big costs are vulnerability of programs and staff to vicissitudes of funding and ambiguity about identity--are they for teachers as professionals or for community people as amateur teachers and continuing learners? Organizational flexibility and insulation from the constraints of the school district administration are benefits identified. Thus the Education Resource Center philosophy of learning is not threatened by the dominant norms of a large, bureaucratic system, but they do face the imperative to alter programs as funding sources and community interests change. Their philosophy thus is still vulnerable.

When a center serves only teachers, the issues are much less complex. Serving a wider constituency requires attention to the interests and needs of many other people with differing educational roles. In this sense both the public school based center in Charlotte and the community based center in Chicago--both serving other constituencies besides teachers--share a similar situation: being sensitive to people with varying roles results either in multiple and flexible program focus or in a decision to serve fewer constituencies.

E. Assessing Teachers' Concerns and Needs.

Almost all teachers' centers ask individual teachers what they consider to be their own needs for professional improvement what they would like to get from the teachers' center. -A variety of techniques are employed. Perhaps the most frequently used procedure is simply to attend to what teachers say and do while they are engaged in activities at the center. Results from the Chicago Teachers' Center, the Philadelphia Teacher Parent Center, and the WCOE in New York offer examples of how skilled center staffers engage in a continuing informal needs assessment. Many centers, however, also conduct more formal and systematic needs surveys. Two common methods are a computer analyzed·checklist of possible goals and activities, and structured interviews combined with open-ended questionnaires. The Ferguson (Missouri) Teacher Center employs a highly developed formal needs assessment procedure. This activity is built into the annual goal-setting and problem solving scheme of the school.

The collaborative research undertaken in the Ferguson project examined the results of informal interviews and contrasted these with

the results from a computerized checklist. The investigators focused on how particular teachers' participation in Center activities was related to the needs they expressed in the two different assessment procedures. The investigators reported that the informal interviews provided rich, concrete, and individualized information that the center staff found difficult to generalize and follow up on, as its program was geared to group workshops or school site problem solving. The formal checklist provided information that was more useful in predicting what group activities teachers would actually select. This research provides some insights into the best use of both types of procedures. The research also reveals the considerable effort that must go into either type of assessment in order for it to be successful. For example, they indicate how previously completed research, theoretical constructs, data from informal interviews with teachers, as well as data on pupils, can be incorporated into the formal surveys.

Another type of assessment activity was studied at the School Resource Network in Ventura, California. The research team examined a scheme designed for the center staff's counseling with entire school faculties at the school site in identifying individual and schoolwide problems and planning subsequent staff development activities for the school. The procedure revolved around a Facilitator Team--three teachers and/or administrators from other schools who met with the school faculty and guided them through a structured process. This school-based assessment process was based on the assumption that teachers should be fully involved in the entire process and on a voluntary basis.

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The study revealed several interesting problems with this rather ambitious assessment procedure. One of the important findings was that teachers perceive or define staff development in different ways. Some teachers defined staff development quite literally as the staff collectively working to resolve a particular problem at the school site. For others, it was seen more generically as any activities designed to assist teachers and especially activities teachers could use to fulfill individual needs. These fundamental differences in perceptions contributed to different degrees of support for the all-school procedure. The investigators concluded that individual as well as collective needs must be considered. Again, the role of the school principal is critical. The danger of this person assuming a preemptory function in the school assessment process is considered in this study. The issue of individualized and informal assessing of needs is not resolved by these studies; both agree it is costly and time consuming. Both also agree that informal procedures yield valuable results.

F. Teachers! Center Governance.

When the United States Office of Education first developed regulations for funding teachers' centers, a major concern was the governance of those centers. In order to qualify for federal support, a center was required to operate under the supervision of a policy board on which classroom teachers constituted a majority. These teachers were to be representative of all the elementary and secondary classroom teachers served by the center.

Some existing centers had such a board; most did not. The regulation clearly made governance and teacher control an issue,

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and it was thought that this would be a topic of strong interest,
generating many research proposals. Yet only two proposals were
submitted on this topic; one was supported. Perhaps the governance
issue was not considered to be as important as was thought. Alter-
natively, the issue may have been settled for many centers simply
because the regulations were so explicit and final.

The Detroit Center for Professional Growth and Development
presented an interesting case: for five years it had been governed
by a five-member board that operated by consensus and was representa-
tive of the teachers' union, the school board, the administrators
organization, the intermediate district, and Wayne State University.
In 1980 that Center received federal support, and a new eleven-member
board with a teacher majority was established. Because the Detroit
Center had kept careful records of all board meetings, as well as
extensive documentation of Center activities, the opportunity was
available to examine the effects of the change from consensus to
majority decision making.

Few changes in Center procedures were noted. The efficiency of
meetings declined as it became more difficult for full attendance
to be achieved. Release time for board members became an issue,
but this was the only important change. Teachers' evaluations of
Center programs were consistent over time. Changes in program were
attributed to shortage of money rather than to board policy. The
board expressed the same goals as before, and attended to the same
problems. Most of their concern was with financial support; both
boards delegated authority for program development to Center staff,.
which remained constant when the board changed.

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The situation may not be typical of all teachers' centers; other policy boards may be more active in program decisions. And the Detroit case may not be illustrative of what might occur in other centers if teachers become majority (or minority) members of a board. But it does represent a rather surprising finding, suggesting that a supervisory board with a majority of teachers may not be so very different from a board without that majority, so long as the board is attentive to the concerns of the participants and selects and retains good staff.

Nonetheless, there does appear to be some relationship between the size of the board and the number of meetings conducted. It may also be that the analysis was not fine-grained enough to discern more subtle but important changes that occurred in these meetings. In this situation, and likely in many teachers' centers, the policy board is primarily concerned with economic solvency and the establishment of general guidelines to insure that teachers' needs and concerns are accommodated. The basic responsibility for translating these policy decisions into programmatic terms is left to the center director, putting this person in a very critical position. This relationship between policy and program is deserving of more study, as is the key role of those directors who are responsible for the administration of general policy decisions.

This concludes the review of research findings from the 14 projects. Their inquiry was supported at very modest levels; it allowed teams of practitioners and researchers to examine questions of importance at specific centers. It would be unrealistic to expect startling new findings, but many of the tentative findings

are provocative. I shall briefly mention some implications of these research efforts.

III. IMPLICATIONS

The experienced teachers' center practitioner will likely see implications for his or her own practice in each of these research efforts. In this section I will focus on those implications, emerging from the several reports taken together, that speak to practices and principles common to many teachers' centers. Research often serves to verify what the practitioner already suspects from experience and intuition. Those experienced with teachers' center work will find that to be the case for many of the projects reported here. Their results imply how program emphases can be determined, suggest means for increasing participation in centers, and identify sources of support for centers.

A. Working with Individuals.

Projects that investigated participants' perceptions of teachers' centers or some aspect of teachers' center programs all reach a common conclusion. The most important contribution of teachers' centers is their emphasis upon working with individual teachers over time. It is this emphasis that most distinguishes teachers' centers work from other quality inservice education programs. A recent survey of federally supported teachers' centers found that interaction with individual teachers was the keystone of teachers' center work. They report:

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> Teacher centers may be most clearly distinguished
> from other approaches to inservice education by the
> priority that is placed on addressing the needs of
> individual teachers. (Mertens and Yarger).

Mertens and Yarger refer to the tailoring of assistance to individual

teachers. The research sponsored in these projects supports this as

important and elaborates as well on how such assistance is provided.

In working with teachers, centers tend to provide a rich setting that

suggests alternatives to present practice. They also have staff mem-

bers who can respond to and expand teachers' varied interests. These

center practitioners have a commitment to continuing to work with

teachers as new concerns arise over time.

These investigations suggest that the concerns teachers initially

express are but clues to deeper interests or needs. Thus, the specific

initial request can be viewed as an entry point. The staff and the set-

ting may suggest other interests. The teacher may well realize that

there are other needs but not be willing to share these until he or she

is sure that a trusting relationship exists. The teacher must believe

that his or her work is respected and that admitting a need is not

equivalent to admitting a serious deficiency. A sensitive staff re-

cognizes this and gradually encourages expressions of other concerns.

By providing a setting in which this is possible a center is responsive

to teachers in ways that are not possible in large group activities

that tend to address predetermined issues and reflect more general,

group concerns.

A teachers' center staff should be analytical when teachers

seek help. They should be responsive to both the initial concern

and possible alternatives that may be valued by the teacher. When

appropriate, they should encourage extended work with the teacher

and recognize the developmental nature of many important learnings. In short, they should go beyond responding successfully to the request and make plans for following up on the contact and staying in touch with the teacher over time.

B. Providing Incentives and Disseminating Teachers' Work.

Some centers provide financial incentives for teachers to engage in individual activities. This is one way in which participation can be encouraged, and it is an important component of many center pro-grams.

Financial awards can be very important, both for the learning opportunities they make possible and for the symbolic recognition they give to teachers. In the face of increasingly scarce funds for centers, it may seem incongruous to suggest awarding even small amounts of money to teachers for individual purposes. But these awards appear to validate the worth of a teacher's work and their sense of potency. Additionally, since these monetary awards often result in materials and ideas developed within a local context, and by local practitioners, there is a greater possibility that they will be used by the teacher and his or her colleagues.

The research results suggest that center staff must find ways to spread word of the work teachers develop in the center. This appears important whether teachers have received financial support for their work or not. Recognition through dissemination also validates a teacher's efforts. Materials produced at a center that result in structural changes--in ways classrooms are organized or instruction conducted--become centrally important and frequently remain in use over time. Alerting teachers to ideas that have

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become from and substance in other classrooms vividly illustrates how teachers' investments in their continuing growth do make a difference in the classroom.

C. Assessing Teachers' Needs.

Those projects that included an analysis of needs assessments methods in their research are also suggestive. There are advantages to different types of needs assessments. Different procedures yield different results, not just in identifying different needs and interests, but in identifying different types of needs and interests. Centers working with entire faculties should remember that the needs and interests of individual teachers are often different from those expressed by the faculty as a whole. An important implication, then, is that centers should retain their orientation to individuals even while working with the aggregate faculty. Much of the basis for teachers' support of centers lies with the credibility and trust that has resulted from this individual work. It remains important to attend to individual as well as group concerns, especially for centers that include work with entire building staffs as part of their program.

Additionally, there appear to be benefits from informal, personalized needs assessment that are not obvious in the assessment results themselves. Involving staff and participants in informal sensing of needs can yield subtleties and insights simply not available in more formal procedures. Informal assessment also offers the advantage of moving beyond assessment to joint reflection about program possibilities. Thus, one implication of this research is that while centers can conduct large-scale, formal needs assessments that yield accurate results at less cost, other types of assessment yield a greater

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richness of understanding about individuals and suggest activities that would not have surfaced otherwise.

D. Developing Support for the Center.

Throughout the reports, but especially in those that studied sources of support for the center, the importance of center participants encouraging their colleagues to participate in center activities emerges. Teachers are the most important means of promoting center use. Administrators are also important. They can encourage participation and they can create obstacles to participation. A respected administrator, by failing to express support, may also be masking an implicit message that center activities are not valued. But it is the frequent users of the center who do most to encourage other teachers' use. The implication is that a focus on frequent users interacting with infrequent or non-users may better advertise the resources and benefits of a center than a widespread dissemination effort. Assisting users in helping their colleagues find ways to use the center is likely a valuable use of staff time.

This is related to my first point; by providing a quality program that is responsive to individual teachers, a center will develop its most important source of core support. Although such teachers' support may not be sufficient to continue a center in times of financial reductions, lack of this support is likely to be fatal. It's also important (as two projects discovered) to align the center with influential persons within the system who are supportive of the philosophy and goals of the center. In summary, it is a combination of factors--providing individual attention and quality programs, recognizing the worth and work of teachers,

attending in varied, creative ways to their expressions of interest

and need, and working with center participants in encouraging others

to use the center--that contribute to success and the continued

growth of teachers' center.

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