

IN PROFESSIONS such as medicine and law, members are expected to review the journals of their field and to attend conferences. They observe each other's work, offering feedback that leads to increased professional effectiveness. They also are expected to examine and explore new methods and approaches to their work. Professionals, according to Webster, have a codified knowledge base that can be increased consistently through ongoing research that seeks new means by which to expand members' effectiveness. And professionals maintain familiarity with research in their field.

Studying one's profession, especially when done in community with others, where the learning is richer and deeper, has not been the norm in the education community. Educators typically have been physically isolated from each other because of the structure of school facilities and the schedules that dominate the school day. This physical isolation has resulted in mental isolation as well when colleagues have little interaction. However, knowledge is most fruitfully constructed in a social context. Providing the opportunities — the structures and schedules — for school-based educators to come together to learn in community is an important challenge for the next decade of teachers' professional learning.

In the future, collective learning will be the hallmark of the school

staff, and schools will have created the conditions that support a community of professionals in their learning. These conditions take two forms: the structural or physical, and the human or relational.

Schools will have moved beyond arranging learning for elementary school grade-level teams or secondary school department meetings. While learning can occur in such groups, these teams have typically met for management issues, and teachers' broader learning is restricted to the pooled knowledge and skills of their small group. Teachers will have developed the skills to access relevant research and resources to advance in professionalism. Schools where teachers and principals are continuously learning make it possible for the entire faculty to convene to learn with and from each other regularly and frequently in sessions where they introduce new sources or avenues for their study and learning. Regularly and frequently coming together to learn in community allows all professionals to stay on course with the school's focus and goals and enables the school to move uniformly toward its goals for students.

One challenge in making learning

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THOUGHT LEADER

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Learn in community with others

in community possible is arranging time and schedules so that the staff can come together for this important work. Resources, both human and material, contribute to the success of the adult learning community. District and state policies, as well as the parent and business community's understanding about the continuous learning needs of the staff, will be influential. These and other factors contribute to the structural conditions that support the learning of the adults.

Relational conditions are also vital to the success and effective functioning of the professionals' community of learners. Teachers and principals will have developed the skills needed to learn how to learn together.

Professionals in the schools of the future will have shared and have come to clear consensus about their values and beliefs about what the school should do and what its purpose should be as a place for learning — learning for all students and all adults. Based on their values, they will have studied the literature to determine

what their school should look like and will have developed a shared vision of how educators will operate and how they will relate to each other and to students.

The system will support leadership development so the school's leadership becomes distributed and is inclusive. Positional leaders of the staff will share power and authority with the school organization's members. Members will contribute to decision making. The shift to distributed leadership occurs as staff members study and learn ways they can participate in leading the school. They will examine and study issues together to be sure that decisions are sound and in students' best interests. Such shared and supported leadership development increases teachers' assessment of their own value and contributes to their professionalism.

Trust is a prime factor in developing positive and productive relationships among staff, and systems will give attention and effort to building trust. All teachers and administrators

of the community will develop trust in their colleagues and become trustworthy so that open dialogue, discussion, and debate can occur. This suggests that conflict resolution has been addressed and an approach agreeable to all is in place.

Undoubtedly, the most demanding relationships are those that support teachers in requesting colleagues to visit them in their classrooms, observe the host teacher at work, and have visiting teachers provide feedback. This

feature of the professional learning community is likely the last to develop, as it requires abundant trust and openness to critique. This peer-to-peer observing, critiquing, and learn-

FROM THE FIELD

Cindy Harrison

Time for learning every day



"MY DREAM is that 10 years from now, there will be time for professional development for every teacher in every school every day. In fact, I see teachers placing so much value on professional development that they'll fight for contract language to make sure they get a minimum of 30 to 45 minutes of it daily. The teachers themselves will be actively engaged in the design and delivery of that professional development, which

essentially will involve them spending time together focusing on what's impacting learning in their school.

"If you look at Japan, you'll see teachers are already doing this. They don't teach all day. They have time to work with their colleagues, talking about and reflecting on their work. It's not unlike doctors doing rounds every morning. They walk together in small groups to visit each other's patients. Then they talk about the best treatment plans, with each adding his or her knowledge to the discussion.

"Finding this kind of time for teachers will require changing schedules, restructuring the school day and the ways in which students are divided, and reallocating resources. But if we don't do it, we'll be back to the days when professional development meant bringing in experts to tell teachers what to do. That's essentially teacher 'training,' which never makes an impact in the classroom."

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ing contributes not only to the effectiveness of the individual teacher and administrator, but to the school organization.

Education systems of the future will have understood that the most significant factors determining whether students learn well are the competence, caring, and commitment of teachers and administrators. Educators' expertise, combined with their capacity to communicate and interact meaningfully with students at the students' cognitive, intellectual, and emotional levels, results in powerful connections that enable children to learn at higher standards of quality

and deeper layers of understanding. These educators have a deep commitment to their professionalism and a profound clarity about the purpose of their work. Schools of the future will support educators in continuous study, reflection, dialogue, and learning.

Educators in these schools will have become true professionals through their work as a professional learning community — working just as the three words connote: professionals coming together in community to continuously learn, to increase their effectiveness so students become increasingly successful learners. ■

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