



Pat Roy is co-author of *Moving NSDC's Staff Development Standards Into Practice: Innovation Configurations* (NSDC, 2003).

REFERENCE

Roy, P. & Hord, S. (2003). *Moving NSDC's staff development standards into practice: Innovation Configurations*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

I am the captain of my ship

To prepare for work with principals on building school-based collaboration, we interviewed a number of high school teachers. We wanted real-life examples of teachers' opportunities to work with their peers and asked when, in their day, they had time for collegial interaction. One math teacher explained that there were few opportunities to even see his colleagues, let alone interact — he saw other teachers sometimes at the coffee pot, maybe at mailboxes, or occasionally by the copier. He drew up his hands, placed them on his hips, and exclaimed, "Then, I go into my classroom and — it's just me and the kids! I am the captain of my ship!"

It was a vivid example, which still reminds me that for experienced educators, their work life has been performed primarily in isolation *from other adults*. They make instructional and curricular decisions alone, plan alone, and carry out their work alone. They rarely have to confer with a colleague. Is it any wonder that when we ask teachers to form learning teams or build a learning community or even make instructional or assessment decisions together that some of them are not very good at accomplishing these joint tasks? The principal, we believe, needs to assist teachers in learning how to work successfully with colleagues (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 95).

Principals should not assume that teachers' caring and concern for students will automatically translate into an ability to use effective collaborative skills when working with their peers. The principal may need to help staff understand the stages of group development (i.e. forming, storming, norming, and performing). The principal also needs to assist teachers in applying trust-building and group decision-making skills

to their work with colleagues.

Risk taking is the other side of the coin of trust and is essential when we ask educators to share their lessons, student work, and videotapes of classroom work. One way to build trust and foster risk taking is to ensure that teachers identify interactional norms and decide how they will keep each other accountable for following those norms. The principal also may have to help educators understand that there are many types of decision-making strategies, such as majority rule or consensus, as well as appropriate times to use each strategy.

The principal will also need to support staff in learning and using effective conflict resolution skills. Contrary to popular belief, an effective group is not one that never disagrees. Effective groups disagree all the time, but members have learned to disagree agreeably so that the group remains intact and highly functioning. They know how to phrase their concerns and differences by focusing on *ideas* instead of people. There are many communication skills that help with effective conflict resolution — paraphrasing, I-messages, describing not labeling, and taking the other person's perspective. I have seen more than one group of expert classroom teachers stymied by their colleagues' behaviors. They could handle the situation if it were a student; with their peers, it is altogether another circumstance.

Lastly, while it is not easy to develop collaborative skills — it is worth it. Teachers learn more and are more likely to apply that learning to the classroom when they have been involved in peer collaboration. Principals have a role in developing these skills, as well as modeling, supporting, and sustaining teachers' growth.

NSDC STANDARD

Collaboration: Staff development that improves the learning of all students provides educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate.