

editor's note/

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LEARNING SCHOOLS BRING NSDC'S DEFINITION TO LIFE

Peter Senge writes that learning organizations are places “where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (2006, p. 3).

In this issue of *JSD*, you'll read about learning schools. In these schools and systems, core elements of NSDC's definition of professional learning come to life. As you read through the issue, starting with Stephanie Hirsh's introduction to the definition (p. 10), you'll see the connection between the concept of a learning organization and the high-quality professional development we hope to see in all schools and districts.

At St. Johnsbury School in Vermont (p. 40), teachers used formative assessments and they saw their roles shift; they formed learning communities and benefited from the support this structure gave them. Not only are new patterns of thinking nurtured in this environment, but those teachers are continually learning how to learn together. In Kentucky, the leaders of an initiative to raise the reading levels of struggling high schoolers outlined the results they wanted to see first. They expanded their capacity based on the results they wanted (p. 32).

Looking back at Senge's explanation of a learning organization to the word “aspiration” — that's a word you won't see in NSDC's definition. The word has a loftier, more esoteric sound to it than what you'd put in federal legislation. Aspiration doesn't feel sufficiently results-oriented or standards-based.

Yet aspiration underlies all the work we do in professional learning — it's the force that drives us. Senge details what it means: “There are two fundamental sources of energy that can motivate organizations: fear and aspiration. The power of fear underlies negative visions. The power of aspiration drives positive visions. Fear can produce extraordinary changes in short periods, but aspiration endures as a continuing source of learning and growth” (2006, p. 209).

You're hearing aspiration when educators speak of risk, of trust, of trying again. We see the role of aspiration when educators demand more accountability measures, not fewer, and when they engage in reflective dialogue to push themselves harder. As Hirsh explains, “The new definition of professional development is a moral imperative” — one that can address the inequities that deny some students opportunities for academic success (p. 11). Aspiration is a part of each learning school. Look for it in every article in this issue.

***JSD* goes bimonthly:** We're pleased to announce that *JSD* will come to you six times per year, beginning with the next issue. We know that members will benefit from expanded opportunities to read and write for NSDC. See the inside back cover for upcoming themes and consider submitting an article for publication.

REFERENCE

Senge, P. (2006). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York: Doubleday. ■

NSDC'S PURPOSE: Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves.

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