



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

REFERENCES

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The smart money is on learning communities

Given a choice, would most principals allocate their limited building funds toward bringing in an outside expert to work with their faculty or toward strengthening the capacity of staff members to work productively with each other on professional issues? Expressed this way, I believe many principals would choose the latter. However, it seems the use of outside experts still seems to be the predominant form of professional development in many schools.

Recent research on the characteristics of professional learning that influence teacher practice and student performance emphasizes the importance of collaborative professional learning, where teachers strengthen teaching and learning through analysis of student work, conduct peer observations of classroom practice, analyze student achievement data, plan and analyze lessons, and solve classroom and student problems (Darling-Hammond, *et. al.*, 2009).

With this in mind, principals need to **allocate resources to provide for continuous improvement of school staff.** In particular, principals must **work with faculty to create a learning community so that teachers are supported in their use of new instructional, curricular, and assessment strategies** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 71). The definition of a learning community has recently lost its rigor. Learning community often seems to mean any gathering of people who intend to do some sort of learning, not necessarily in a collaborative fashion. A research-based definition of a professional learning community includes the following components:

- Supportive and shared leadership in which staff shares in organizational decision-making;

- Shared values and vision including an unwavering commitment to student learning;
- Collective learning and application of learning on behalf of student learning;
- Supportive conditions including time, resources, schedule, materials, and funding; and
- Shared practice including observation and feedback of classroom practice including individual assistance and support (Hord, 2004, p. 7).

NSDC STANDARD

Resources: Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires resources to support adult learning and collaboration.

When learning communities are implemented deeply, the school's culture transforms so that teachers and principals are encouraged to openly discuss classroom practice and identify and solve the challenges of teaching and learning. Teachers from a high school in Yuma, Arizona, recently told

me that they examined the results of a common interim assessment to determine learning differences between a set of similar classes. Everyone, including students, brainstormed about how instruction could change to equalize student learning results. This conversation, in my experience, is a wonderful example of a collaborative interaction that seems quite different from the typical exchanges among most educators.

A learning community is truly a different way of conducting school as well as a different way of conducting professional development. Imagine a school where the faculty works as a team to become masterful teachers, where the talk in the teachers' lounge is about problem solving and not complaints about student behavior, where peer observation is as common as student desks, and where professional learning is the province of the faculty (Roy, 1994, p.1)! Now that's a good use of professional learning resources.