



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

REFERENCES

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## A time for brilliant opportunities

One interpretation of the Chinese character for chaos is a place where brilliant dreams are born. Given the current economic situation, many schools and districts are feeling the chaos of budget cutbacks and loss of staff. While traditional, formal professional development may be curtailed, this is an ideal time for brilliant professional learning opportunities to emerge.

District office staff can use this chaotic time as an opportunity to **allocate resources to create staff development that uses a variety of activities/models** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 125). Specifically, resources are **allocated to provide for school-based professional development that is supported by a system of learning teams.**

American education has long embraced a tradition of teacher isolation. This tradition can make high-quality collaborative work difficult to establish. District and school staff members need to build the skills required for productive working relationships so that teachers feel safe examining their individual practice in the company of their colleagues. According to Darling-Hammond, when productive working relationships do exist, “the benefits can include better instruction and more success in solving problems of practice” (Darling-Hammond, et al, 2009, p. 11).

Learning teams can also help to make professional learning more relevant, concrete, and anchored in the challenges “involved in teaching and learning specific academic subject matter” (Darling-Hammond, et al, 2009, p. 10). Learning teams provide educators with the opportunity for hands-on work that not only builds content knowledge and appropriate instructional skills

but that is sensitive to local requirements and conditions such as curriculum guidelines, accountability systems, and student demographics.

Learning teams, through their review and analysis of student achievement data and examples of student work, can identify specific priority skills and concepts that students need to learn as well as content objectives that are most difficult for their students to master. When teachers

study the materials they want their students to learn, “improved teacher practice and student outcomes” resulted (Darling-Hammond, et al, 2009, p. 10).

Effective learning teams require a schedule that provides times for educators to meet during the day within grade-levels or content-areas. A recent compilation of strategies, articles, and tools concerning finding time for

collaborative professional learning can be a helpful resource for the central office as they tackle the time issue (von Frank, 2008).

High-quality professional learning, according to Linda Darling-Hammond and associates, “helps teachers master content, hone teaching skills, evaluate their own and their students’ performance, and address changes needed in teaching and learning in their schools” (Darling-Hammond, et al, 2009, p. 7). Collaborative professional learning approaches, such as learning teams, contribute to these results.

Brilliant dreams can be born during chaotic times; collaborative approaches to professional learning may well be the brilliant dream born of this time.

NSDC STANDARD

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

Learn more about NSDC's standards:  
[www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm)