Professional Community and Professional Development in the Learning-Centered School

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participants from schools, universities, or private industry. Such institutes and other long-term activities permit a measure of content depth together with the kinds of professional exchange that are rarely possible in other kinds of workshop settings. In addition, long-term professional development may involve partnerships with universities, reform organizations, or professional development providers.

**School or Teacher Networks**
Teacher collaboratives and networks grew in size, visibility, and influence during the 1980s and 1990s. Perhaps the most long-lived and widely known exemplar is the National Writing Project, but other well-documented examples exist in science, math, the humanities, and the arts. Lieberman and Miller (1996) posited that networks fill a need created “because schools are organized in ways that often do not encourage the kind of frank discussion that is necessary for inventing new modes of working with students” (p. 14). In these “intentional” but “borderless” learning communities, outside their own bureaucracies, teachers “find it easier to question, ask for help, or ‘tell it like it is,’ rather than be fearful that they are exposing their lack of expertise in a given area” (p. 15; see also Lieberman and Wood 2001).

**Building Teacher Learning into the School Workplace**
Schools join professional development and professional community by strengthening the various naturally occurring niches where professional community might flourish—grade level groups, departments, and teams—and by allocating time, space, and dollars to other kinds of activity that expand the opportunities for teacher learning in the course of ongoing school life. This element of the linking strategy rests on an important premise: that the most promising forms of professional development are those that engage teachers in the ongoing pursuit of genuine questions, problems, and curiosities, over time, in ways that leave a lasting mark on their thinking and practice. The following paragraphs, without constituting an exhaustive set of possibilities, indicate some of the most commonly described approaches to organizing teacher-to-teacher learning opportunities at the school level.

**Teacher Study Groups for Inquiry into Teaching and Learning**
Some schools, especially those affiliated with comprehensive school reform initiatives, have sought to anchor teacher learning in organized teacher study groups. In some cases, teachers are encouraged to frame research topics tied to school goals, priorities, or problems. In other cases, they are afforded complete independence in deciding what to investigate. Examples include the Critical Friends Groups initiated by the Coalition of Essential Schools, and the teacher study groups developed as an integral part of the Atlas Communities school improvement model.\(^1\)

**Lesson Study**
Adapted from a well-established practice in Japanese schools, Lesson Study is a continuous cycle of action research organized by teachers to improve curriculum and instruction. It engages teachers in collaboratively planning a lesson on a key concept and in relation to shared goals and then observing, critiquing, and refining the lesson together.\(^1\) The Standards in Practice (SIP) model, developed by the Education Trust, also focuses on an analysis of lessons in relationship to academic standards. On the premise that “students can do no better than the assignments they are given,” the SIP process joins a review of student work with scrutiny of the corresponding classroom assignment (Education Trust 2003; see http://www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust-SIP+Professional+Development). Participants in school-based teacher groups bring an academic task and samples of the student work that resulted from it. They begin by completing the assignment themselves and then analyzing the learning demands embedded in it and the degree to which it is linked to relevant standards. Using the assignment and standards, they develop a scoring guide for assessing the student work and pose the question of whether a given sample of student work would “meet the standards.” The eventual aim of reviewing student work is to turn attention back to instructional strategy—specifically to the design of appropriate academic tasks.

\(^1\) Although the volume of research is not large, the available studies point to conditions that make such groups more or less productive. For example, see studies of Critical Friends Groups by Nave (2000), Matsumura and Steinberg (2001), and Curry (2004). In addition, The Journal of Staff Development, published by the National Staff Development Council, has published numerous articles designed to help schools organize viable teacher study groups.

\(^2\) The Lesson Study Research Group at Teachers College, Columbia University (http://www.tc.columbia.edu/lessonstudy/), has undertaken a set of case studies aimed at understanding the possibilities and problems of Lesson Study in American schools (Chokshi and Fernandez 2004; Fernandez 2002; Fernandez, Cannon, and Chokshi 2003; Fernandez and Chokshi 2002). For a list of the Research Group studies, see http://www.tc.columbia.edu/lessonstudy/articles_papers.html.
environment by generating professional community, promoting and organizing activity that sustains a focus on teaching and learning, and ensuring that other workplace conditions enhance rather than impede teachers’ professional development and commitment to teaching.

References


