

**Professional Learning Communities:
An Ongoing Exploration**

Melanie S. Morrissey

**Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
211 East Seventh Street
Austin, Texas 78701
512/476-6861**

2000

Table of Contents

Professional Learning Communities: An Ongoing Exploration

A Review of the Five Dimensions

- Supportive and Shared Leadership
- Shared Values and Vision
- Collective Learning and Application of Learning
- Supportive Conditions
- Shared Personal Practice

Recent Literature

- Benefits of Professional Learning Communities
- Developing a Professional Learning Community

An Infrastructure for School Improvement

- Issues Impacting School Reform
 - Organizational Structures
 - Focus of Improvement Work
 - Personal and Social Dynamics
 - Contextual Influences
 - Leadership
- Guiding Questions for Learning

What We Are Learning

- Theme 1: A Way of Operating
- Theme 2: The Relationship of Change and Learning
- Theme 3: An Embedded Value
- Theme 4: Interdependence among the Five Dimensions

First Steps

- Determine School and Staff Readiness
- Consider the Use of an External Change Facilitator
- Identify Barriers and Boosters
- Begin with the Learning

Professional Learning Communities Under Construction

- The Role of the Principal
- A Culture of Collaboration
- A Commitment from All Staff
- The Presence of a Catalyst
- The Use of Change Facilitators

Final Thoughts

Professional Learning Communities: An Ongoing Exploration

As researchers and practitioners examined school improvement efforts of the last decade or more, it became apparent that something important was missing. The narrow, piecemeal attempts made in the past to improve schools lacked the fundamental supportive cultures and conditions necessary for achieving significant gains in teaching and learning. Such attempts were insufficient. Too often, teachers worked in their own isolated classrooms, struggling with the needs of challenging students and lacking productive interaction with colleagues, through which they might have gained new insights and understandings about their practice. Many teachers remain ill prepared to teach every student successfully and lack the skills to challenge students by offering high-quality intellectual learning tasks. In addition, principals often do not know how to help teachers address their own critical learning needs.

We believe that professional learning communities offer an infrastructure to address these issues. The structure provides a context of collegiality, which supports teachers and administrators in improving their practice through learning new curriculum and instructional strategies and the methods for interacting meaningfully with each child. In other words, professional learning communities provide opportunities for professional staff to look deeply into the teaching and learning process and to learn how to become more effective in their work with students. Teacher learning comes *first* in such communities, Carmichael (1982) maintained, with the firm belief that students cannot raise their level of achievement until teachers become more effective in their own practice.

The term “professional learning community” defines itself. A school that operates as such engages the entire group of *professionals* in coming together for

learning within a supportive, self-created *community*. Teacher and administrator learning is more complex, deeper, and more fruitful in a social setting, where the participants can interact, test their ideas, challenge their inferences and interpretations, and process new information with each other. When one learns alone, the individual learner (plus a book, article, or video) is the sole source of new information and ideas. When new ideas are processed in interaction with others, multiple sources of knowledge and expertise expand and test the new concepts as part of the learning experience. The professional learning community provides a setting that is richer and more stimulating.

In the publication *Professional Learning Communities: Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement*, Hord (1997) noted that there was no universal definition of a professional learning community. Based on an extensive literature review of the subject, Hord conceptualized professional learning communities as schools in which the professional staff as a whole consistently operates along five dimensions: (1) supportive and shared leadership, (2) shared values and vision, (3) collective learning and application of learning (formerly identified as collective creativity), (4) supportive conditions, and (5) shared personal practice.

Establishing a professional learning community within a school does not occur quickly or spontaneously. It requires dedicated and intentional effort on the part of the administrator and the professional staff. Each dimension develops at its own pace, many times overlapping with other dimensions.

A Review of the Five Dimensions

Supportive and Shared Leadership

School change and educational leadership literature clearly recognizes the influence of the role of campus administrator on school improvement (Hord, 1992). This leadership provided by individuals within the school is critical in guiding and supporting successful implementation of new policies and/or practice. Within professional learning communities, the traditional role of omnipotent principal has been replaced by a shared leadership structure. In such a model, administrators, along with teachers, question, investigate, and seek solutions for school improvement. All staff grow professionally and learn to work together to reach shared goals. Campus administrators provide the necessary organizational and structural supports for such collaborative work among staff. Administrators display a willingness to participate in collective dialogue without dominating, and they share the responsibilities of decision making with the staff.

Shared Values and Vision

A fundamental characteristic of the professional learning community's vision is its unwavering focus on student learning. The shared values and vision among school staff guide decisions about teaching and student learning, and support norms of behavior. In this community, the vision is what Martel (1993) would define as "a total quality focus" (p. 24). The values, as noted earlier, are embedded in the day-to-day actions of the school staff, wherein the learning community engages and develops the commitment and talents of all individuals in a group effort that pushes for learning of high intellectual quality. These values then create the norms of a self-aware, self-critical, and increasingly effective professional organization, utilizing the commitment of its members to seek ongoing renewal and improvement (Sirotnik, 1999; Little, 1997).

Collective Learning and Application of Learning

Originally “collective creativity” (Hord, 1997), the name of this dimension has been changed to reflect more accurately the learning, and the application of learning that occurs. Professional learning communities engage school staff at all levels in processes that collectively seek new knowledge and ways of applying that knowledge to their work. The collegial relationships that result produce creative and appropriate solutions to problems, strengthening the bond between principal and teachers and increasing their commitment to improvement efforts. Such schools move beyond discussions of revising the schedule or establishing new governance procedures to focus on areas that can contribute to significant school improvement – curriculum, instruction, assessment, and the school’s culture. High standards are adopted in all content areas, and professional staff take the responsibility to ensure high levels of achievement for all students. Teachers use a pedagogy that establishes relevance of the curriculum, and students are engaged in learning activities that respond to their cultures and needs as learners (Reyes, Scribner, & Paredes Scribner, 1999). Educators seek the best strategies and instructional practices to engage their students in learning, and they make the necessary adjustments to respond to the students’ diverse learning needs.

Supportive Conditions

Structures that support the vision of a school and learning community are vital to the effectiveness and innovation of teaching at the classroom level. Creating supportive structures, including a collaborative environment, has been described as “the single most important factor” for successful school improvement and “the first order of business” for those seeking to enhance the effectiveness of their school (Eastwood & Louis, 1992, p. 215). Hord (1997) cited two types of supportive structures found within professional learning communities: structural conditions and collegial relationships. The structural conditions include use of time, communication procedures, size of the school, proximity of teachers, and

staff development processes. Collegial relationships include positive educator attitudes, widely shared vision or sense of purpose, norms of continuous critical inquiry and improvement, respect, trust, and positive, caring relationships. Within professional learning communities, it is often necessary to find innovative ways to create the necessary time and resources to allocate to whole-staff learning, problem solving, and decision making. Creating supportive conditions is a key to maintaining the growth and development of a community of professional learners.

Shared Personal Practice

Elmore (2000) states that “schools and school systems that are improving directly and explicitly confront the issue of isolation” by creating multiple avenues of interaction among educators and promoting inquiry-oriented practices while working toward high standards of student performance (p. 32). Teacher interaction within a formalized structure for collegial coaching provides the means for confronting the issue of isolation in professional learning communities. Through such interaction, teachers continue to build a culture of mutual respect and trustworthiness for both individual and school improvement, and they also exhibit increased commitment to their work. Shared personal practice is limited, even in highly functioning learning communities, and tends to be the last of the dimensions to develop. Darling-Hammond (1998) cites research reporting that teachers who spend more time collectively studying teaching practices are more effective overall at developing higher-order thinking skills and meeting the needs of diverse learners. Sharing personal practice requires a complete paradigm shift from traditional roles in education. It is, however, the clearest link to the classroom.

A professional learning community produces high levels of achievement for all students within an environment of continuous inquiry and improvement if it is focused on student results. It values and respects each of its members and insists

that all students achieve to high standards. One factor organizes all contexts within a professional learning community, and that is the shared purpose of improving student learning outcomes. All members of such a community are invested in the learning and changing necessary to address the needs of all students and help them to achieve high standards of learning.

Recent Literature

Benefits of Professional Learning Community

In 1997, SEDL's first effort to understand, describe, and report on professional learning communities was published (Hord, 1997). Since that time, the literature has expanded. Reyes, Scribner, and Paredes Scribner (1999) espouse the benefits of professional learning communities in their work with Hispanic schools. In these schools, which were at one time characterized as low-performing, the creation of learning communities assisted staff in overcoming the implementation problems that had accompanied past reform efforts and also increased student achievement. School staff learned to develop their own capacities in order to produce improved student outcomes from year to year, despite increasing changes in their school and surrounding communities that made teaching and learning more challenging.

Thiessen & Anderson (1999) discuss means of transforming learning communities, in which learning by teachers is connected to school improvement and improved learning for students. The authors encourage collaboration, integration, and inquiry in schools, as well as continuous engagement in actions to challenge the conditions, the relationships, the responsibility and control, and the teaching and learning that shape a school. Through such ongoing inquiry, the authors agree, schools become stronger, more productive places where teaching has improved and increases in learning are evidenced by all students.

DuFour and Eaker (1998) also highlight professional learning communities, encouraging schools to reflect on their collective capacity to address the learning needs of their students. The authors conclude that ongoing improvement efforts can succeed only when a community of colleagues supports each other through the inevitable difficulties associated with school reform.

Peter Senge, who is one of the founding fathers of the learning organization concept in the business sector (1990), has recently acknowledged the importance of learning communities in schools (2000). He recognizes schools as “a meeting ground for learning – dedicated to the idea that all those involved with it, individually and together, will be continually enhancing and expanding their awareness and capabilities” (p. 6).

Smylie and Hart (1999) emphasize that increased student learning is inextricably tied to teacher learning and collaboration, stating: “It has become increasingly clear that if we want to improve schools for student learning, we must also improve schools for the adults who work within them. . . . We have only recently come to understand that student learning also depends on the extent to which schools support the ongoing development and productive exercise of teachers’ knowledge and skills (p.421).”

In their discussion of improving the organizational capacity of schools, Newmann and Wehlage (1995) specifically identify professional learning communities as a means to that end. The researchers say that such an arrangement, identified by clear and shared purpose, collaboration, and collective responsibility for student learning, is critical to effective teaching, and has a direct effect on the improvement of student learning.

Rather than becoming a reform initiative itself, a professional learning community becomes the supporting structure for schools to continuously transform themselves through their own internal capacity. Leithwood and Louis (1998) suggest that “the task is not just to create a school organization capable of implementing the current set of reform initiatives . . . in the context of today’s turbulent environments. Rather, the task is to design an organization capable of productively responding, not only to such current initiatives in today’s

environment, but to the needless number of initiatives, including new definitions of school effectiveness, that inevitably will follow” (p. 6).

Developing a Professional Learning Community

At this point, little has been written to guide schools toward professional learning community development. Rather, several researchers have written about developing *aspects* of the professional learning community, presenting specific strategies or tools for working with school staffs. For example, DuFour and Eaker (1998) discuss the elements and importance of the mission and vision in schools, and they walk the reader through activities that can be taken to revamp the mission and vision at their schools. Similar strategies are offered regarding the development of values and goals with school staff, but that is where the detailed examples stop.

Similarly, Wald and Castleberry (2000) offer tools and processes for developing vision, establishing staff development plans, and engaging staff in collaborative listening and learning. While useful and pertinent, the strategies they discuss are limited to particular events or situations and do not attend to the day-to-day processes for engaging staff in fully developing the five dimensions of professional learning communities.

Vision strategies are addressed also in Senge (2000), who emphasizes dialogue, reflection, and the mastery of five key disciplines (personal mastery, shared vision, mental models, team learning, and systems thinking) by school staff. Senge strongly urges readers to use their collective experiences in applying the five disciplines to the school setting, offering tools for school staffs to galvanize their learning and thus create schools that can address the issues of today by employing collective wisdom.

An Infrastructure for School Improvement

The power and effectiveness of professional learning communities come from their position as communities of continuous inquiry and improvement. In order to help low-performing schools become communities of continuous inquiry and improvement, one must first acknowledge and understand the issues that are affecting those schools' efforts to make improvements. New programs or practices that do not acknowledge and address the underlying issues will merely scratch the surface, and are unlikely to be sustainable over time to benefit learning.

Issues Impacting School Reform

During the last two years, SEDL has engaged in a project that examined how schools undertaking comprehensive reform experienced these improvement efforts. Collectively, the sites displayed characteristics that are symptomatic of the challenges in public education across the nation – achievement scores were consistently low or falling, students were unhappy and/or unmotivated, parents were ignored, community members were disengaged, and school staff did not believe they could affect student learning.

The objective of this work was to engage in partnerships with low-performing schools and to assist them in undertaking comprehensive school reform efforts by providing resources, materials, and group facilitation. While SEDL staff did not go into the schools to create professional learning communities, each SEDL staff member was strongly committed to the professional learning community philosophy and its infrastructure to support school improvement efforts. The value of professional learning communities was reinforced when SEDL staff reviewed the first year's work at each site and identified five core issues that were significantly affecting schools' past and present efforts at improvement:

organizational structures, focus of improvement work, personal and social dynamics, contextual influences, and leadership.

There are distinct parallels between the issues that low-performing schools are struggling with and the dimensions that support a strong professional learning community in higher-performing schools.

Figure 1

Relationship of Core Issues and Professional Learning Community Dimensions

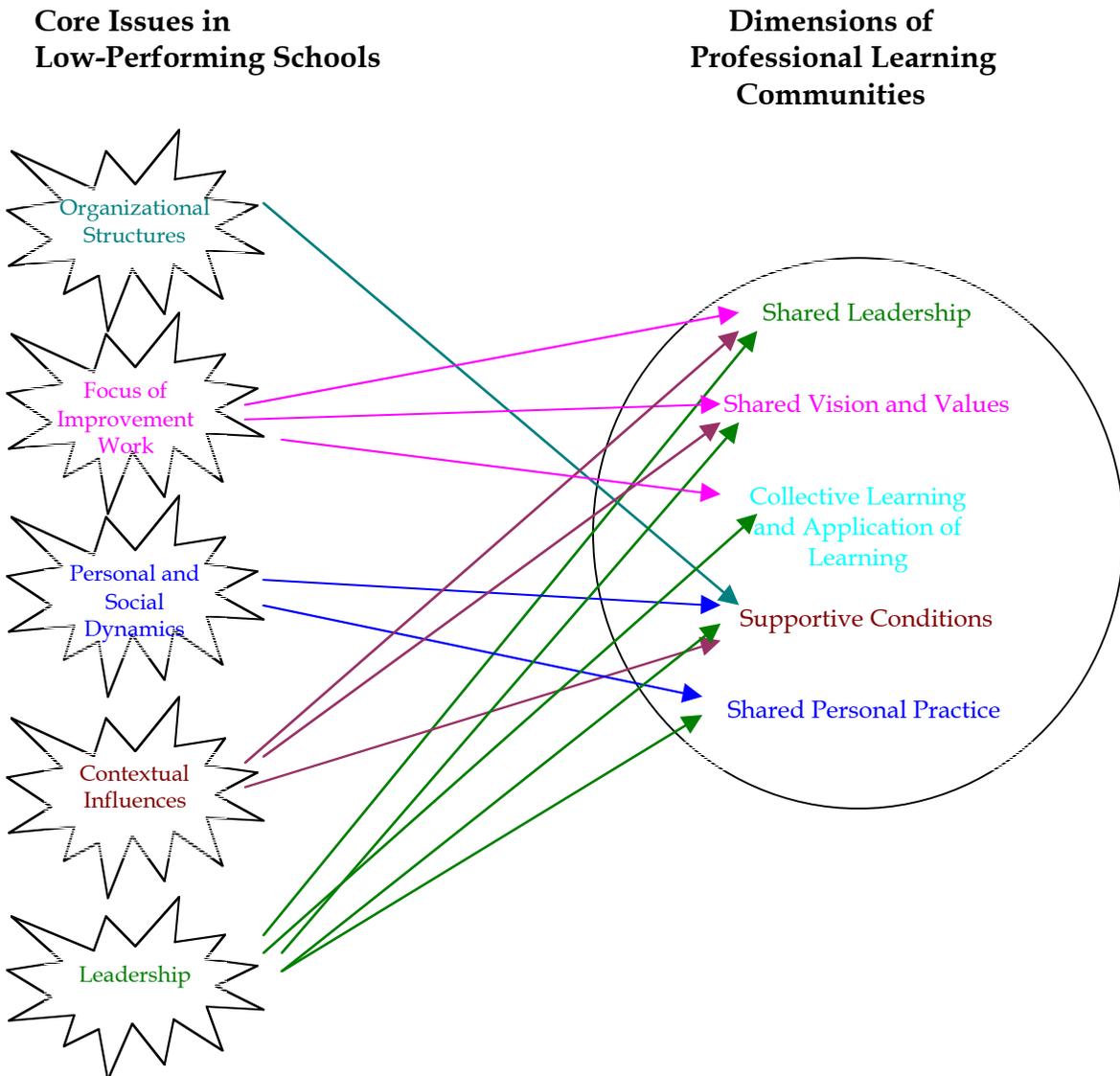


Figure 1 displays how the two frameworks (five core issues in low-performing schools and five dimensions of professional learning communities) relate to each other.

The five dimensions of the professional learning community infrastructure *support* school improvement efforts while the five core issues constitute *barriers* to the improvement process. In reviewing these findings, SEDL staff confirmed the importance of a supportive professional learning community infrastructure. Low-performing schools are weak in the identified factors where professional learning communities are strong. The following is a brief clarification of each core issue (Morrissey, 2000), and its parallel(s) within professional learning communities.

Organizational Structures. With appropriate structures and processes in place, effective schools run efficiently. In the study schools, many of the necessary organizational supports were lacking, and the result was disorganization, unclear directions and processes, few to no avenues for problem solving or collaboration among staff, and frustrated teachers. Finding time for staff to come together for learning, problem solving or decisionmaking was difficult at these sites. Communication among school staff, district staff, and community members was weak, and organizational processes necessary to run the school efficiently were lacking, as well. A disconnect between purpose, intent, and action resulted at each of the sites.

Within professional learning communities, *Supportive Conditions* are provided for staff to go about their daily work and engage in learning together; the physical conditions of a school are attended to. Time is provided for staff to meet regularly in large and small groups. Acknowledging that finding such time is a critical component to their success, staff value the time provided by engaging in substantive work and learning together. Communication and organizational

processes run smoothly within the administrative office and among the school staff. Weekly or daily bulletins are issued, informing staff of events, decisions, and questions. Communication structures with the central office are clearly established, and parents are regularly informed of school events via newsletters and phone calls.

Focus of Improvement Work. Maintaining an undeviating focus on students is central to identifying and articulating purposeful intent for any school's reform work. Such a focus was lacking at the comprehensive reform sites. Often, small groups or individuals appeared to have a grasp of the overall intent of improvement work at the sites, but staff-wide common focus and effort were not apparent. Also significant were the low levels of teacher empowerment found within these schools – teachers' ability and willingness to access information, identify needs and potential solutions, and engage in self-study were limited. The result was inconsistency of purpose, mixed messages, and inefficient implementation of instructional strategies across the sites. Staff were unclear about the usefulness of examining student achievement data, did not participate in collaborative problem solving, and held low expectations with regard to their students' achievement potential. These schools did not seek information by tapping into research or literature regarding best practices, and they made little use of available technical assistance providers. In addition, each school site struggled with conflict among the staff and had limited resolution strategies in place.

The focus of school improvement work within professional learning communities is supported and maintained by three dimensions, *Supportive and Shared Leadership*, *Shared Values and Vision*, and *Collective Learning and Application of Learning*. In schools with the professional learning community infrastructure, the values and vision are clearly established and articulated among staff. The shared vision is used as a lens for all improvement initiatives, and it provides the

foundation for the work the staff engages in together. Data are analyzed with the focus in mind, and current research and literature are examined and discussed among staff, in order to identify best practice for their school. This collective learning provides opportunities for professional staff to discuss the needs of their students and engage in study to inform their teaching practices in addressing those needs. *Supportive and Shared Leadership* plays a part in maintaining the focus by using the vision with the staff to guide decision making. Campus principals, through their words and actions, also model the vision on a daily basis for staff, students and parents/community.

Personal and Social Dynamics. A culture of trust, mutual respect and regard within relationships, and collective engagement of staff and administrators are components of effective schools. However, the personal and social dynamics at the study sites varied substantially. At some schools, the staff were open with one another, and a certain level of trust had been established over time. At other sites, however, the culture was distrustful – or at best, unsupportive – of staff-wide openness and respect. At each site there was the need to establish norms with the group about working together and set some precedents regarding group involvement. There were very few opportunities, either within school or outside of it, for staff to do fun things together, learn together, laugh together, or just get to know each other. Little or no work had been done with school staffs to acknowledge and value the differences in culture, experience, and expertise that they brought to the school environment. Due to the limited interactions among the staff, opportunities for building trust and collegial growth were hindered.

Again, the *Supportive Conditions* dimension in professional learning communities addresses these issues. The people capacities, which include positive attitudes and relationships, are valued and nurtured among staff. Norms that support the vision for the school are discussed and maintained by all professional staff, and efforts are made to keep communications clear, respectful, and caring.

Professional learning communities appear to function more as “families,” engaging in problem solving and conflict resolution when needed. Another component of professional learning communities is *Shared Personal Practice*, which requires openness, trust, and respect among colleagues. Once positive relationships have been established among staff members, the sharing of teaching methods and strategies becomes a trusted and valued practice within the school community.

Contextual Influences. A school does not operate separate or apart from surrounding entities.

School contextual factors include: maintenance of the physical plant; relationships among students and staff; issues of culture, race, and education; and low expectations for staff as learners.

Community contextual factors include: negative media; concerned board members; disputes between communities; staff discomfort in working with parents and community members;

District contextual factors include: numerous requests of schools with regard to policies; administrivia; organized systems for maintaining data, resources/materials, and record keeping.

State-level contextual factors include: communication of policies, adoptions, and mandates that have significant impact on the operation of schools. In the case of these low-performing schools, each set of contextual factors deeply affected progress in school improvement.

Within professional learning community schools, the *Shared Vision and Values* and *Supportive Conditions* that are in place temper the various contextual influences. School conditions for learning are reflected in the shared vision among staff and students, maintaining a pleasant teaching and learning environment, with positive relationships with students and high expectations for all. Communication lines between the school and the community, as well as the

district office, are open as the result of positive working relationships. In an aspect of the *Supportive and Shared Leadership* dimension, requirements of the state are communicated to staff via the district office and the principal, who stays current on changes in policy and regulations.

Leadership. The most critical of the themes emerging from the first year of work was the leadership capacity of the principals, which had significant impact and influence on the other four core issues. Without identifying a shared focus for improvement, administrators could not guide their staff in developing and articulating a collective vision for their students or their school. This lack of clarity made it difficult for the administrators to model the vision or mental image of improvement through their actions with staff, students, parents, and community. The expectations of administrators for their staff and students tended to be based on historical norms and relationships, and high expectations were rarely modeled for staff or students. The absence of decision-making structures prevented teachers from being involved in long-range planning and resulted in unilateral decisions made by the administrator. A lack of organizational systems was apparent in planning efforts, in meetings, and in daily work. Systems for communication among staff and between school and home were also inadequate. Too often, administrators also left conflict to resolve itself, a situation that then became detrimental to the school and/or the staff.

Supportive and Shared Leadership in professional learning communities looks much different than in low-performing schools. Using their *Shared Values and Vision* as a lens, administrators guide the school with the participation of their professional teaching staff. Expectations are high for all staff and students, and the principal models those expectations daily in words and actions. Decision-making structures are developed and put into place by the principal to facilitate the involvement of teachers in decision responsibilities. The administrator is primarily responsible for developing the *Supportive Conditions* within their

school. In designing efficient systems for operation, communication, and learning, the principal influences the physical conditions within a school. In providing opportunities for staff to learn together, to have fun together, and to work together, the principal is developing the people capacities on the campus. The actions of leadership pave the way for *Collective Learning and Application of Learning and Shared Personal Practice* to occur within a professional learning community school.

It is interesting to note the parallels between the core issues affecting comprehensive reform at the low-performing schools, and the dimensions that support and nurture professional learning communities. Not only did the comprehensive school reform project provide evidence of the lack of development of school improvement infrastructures in low-performing schools but it also strengthened the argument for developing professional learning communities in all schools.

Research shows that low-performing schools can overcome the implementation problems that accompany reform efforts, and increase student achievement, when the staff and school are organized as a professional learning community (Lee, Smith & Croninger, 1995; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Reyes, Scribner & Paredes Scribner, 1999). In such cases, school staffs have learned to develop their own capacity in order to produce improved student outcomes from year to year. It is clear that the development of a professional learning community – an environment that nurtures and supports learning together, trust, respect, common goals, and high expectations for staff and students – can address the issues that many educators are struggling with in their schools today.

Guiding Questions for Learning

A school that experiences consistently high student achievement scores is not necessarily a school that exemplifies a professional learning community.

Frequently, such a school is one in which student demographics or needs have not changed significantly over time and school staff have found a comfortable place in their teaching of the basics as assessed by achievement tests. If, however, this school staff is expected to address higher curriculum standards, if they are required to provide higher-quality intellectual learning tasks for their students, or if their community experiences a significant change in student population or demographics (not uncommon in our ever-changing society), they are often ill prepared to address their students' academic needs.

School staffs that work together as professional learning communities reach and maintain high achievement scores while engaging in continuous inquiry to address the diverse needs of students (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). In the event of a significant change in this type of school, staff are prepared to accommodate the learning needs of their students and will have a structure in place to immediately address new situations. In fact, it is likely that such a staff will have been preparing for changes in advance, predicting the upcoming needs of their learners, and learning ways of revising their methods in preparation for change.

At a point when schools are increasingly expected to compensate for changes in family structures, shifting trends in popular culture and commercialism, poverty, violence, child abuse, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and general social upheaval, it is clear that support systems for educators are critical. The ongoing process of inquiry and improvement within a professional learning community that is centered around meeting the needs of students nurtures the growth and change necessary for improving the effectiveness of the teaching and administrative staff. All members of the community are invested in helping *all* students achieve high standards of learning. It is with this focus that schools formerly struggling with such demands have been lifting themselves "up by the bootstraps" and making improvements that knock them off the lists of low-performing schools. Research continues to show that professional learning

communities provide the structures and assistance essential to educators who are addressing the increasingly diverse needs of their students (Reyes, Scribner, & Paredes Scribner, 1999).

What the research lacks, however, is knowledge regarding the manifestation of professional learning community characteristics. What happens, or what is done, to turn a low-performing school into one that operates as a professional learning community, that then exceeds former expectations regarding student achievement and staff interaction? Are there key elements in schools that have made this transformation? If so, what are they? What processes or strategies are put in place to assist the growth and change of school staffs' professional practices into a community arrangement? What motivates school administrators and school staffs to examine their actions collectively and deeply and make significant turnarounds in their practice? What barriers get in the way of creating professional learning communities, and how do school staffs steer around them successfully? What elements of support are necessary for school staffs while they are undergoing the process of change to professional learning communities? Can this learning be taught, or is it simply the result of keen awareness, intrinsic motivation, and the resulting actions on the part of school staffs and/or administrators? What, if any, of this information can be replicated in schools across the country?

While the terms used to describe professional learning communities vary in the research literature, the dimensions of such communities are consistently thematic and are similar to the five identified by Hord (1997). The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) has been diligently focused on adding to that work. To that end, SEDL staff developed a new research agenda, with the intent not only to confirm the previously identified dimensions of professional learning communities but also to begin identifying actions taken by administrators,

teaching staff, and external change facilitators who are attempting to *develop* a professional learning community.

The remaining text of this document is the initial result of that work – which acknowledges and begins to answer the “How do you get there?” question that has been asked repeatedly by administrators and teachers when SEDL staff have shared research about professional learning communities. Our speculation is that schools continue to struggle with improvement issues because there is a significant disconnect between “what the research says” and the school’s ability to put that research into practice while simultaneously balancing the daily struggles and dramas associated with the highly complex organizations that we call schools. Our experience suggests that research-proven practices can be more effectively transferred to the classroom when teachers have the support of their professional colleagues as they learn about and implement new programs and processes. This document will share what SEDL staff are learning about the actions of educators who are developing these communities of professional learners – how they’ve gotten there, or how they are presently working to get there.

What We Are Learning

Throughout our research on professional learning communities, four key themes emerged that will be echoed here: (1) A professional learning community is not a thing; rather, it is a way of operating. (2) Change requires learning, and learning motivates change. (3) When staff work and learn within professional learning communities, continuous improvement becomes an embedded value. (4) Professional learning communities exist when each of the five dimensions are in place and working interdependently together.

Theme 1: A Way of Operating

A critical element in professional learning communities is the continuous engagement of staff in inquiry directed toward improving the learning of students. Such inquiry does not have an endpoint. Instead, it is a state of being, an ongoing process that is sustained over time and changes with the environment and the expectations. All professional members of the school are invested in their own learning and make the changes necessary to become more effective in addressing the needs of all students, helping them to achieve high standards of learning. Although Hord (1997) specified five consistent dimensions of a professional learning community, those were not intended to be a checklist, or a prescription. In the schools that SEDL has studied, all five dimensions were active, interrelated pieces, stable in challenging times, maintained by the school staff, and believed to be vital components of how the school functioned.

Theme 2: The Relationship of Change and Learning

Fullan and Miles (1992) stated: “Change is learning, loaded with uncertainty.” In developing professional learning communities, SEDL has noted that change *requires* learning, based on the understanding that one cannot make improvement unless one knows *how* to improve. More simply stated, “You don’t

know what you don't know." In order for school staff to appreciate and value the changes needed for improving teaching and learning, not only must there be clear reasons for making the changes but also staff must be given a road map of sorts. To value the change, educators must first learn all they need to know about the change.

Coupled with this is the speculation that learning *motivates* change. At many professional learning community sites, the learning engaged in by school staff motivated them, as individuals and as organizations, to make significant changes in their instructional structures and actions. Once teachers and administrators in professional learning communities begin to learn that there are other ways and means for accomplishing their goals, they initiate the necessary actions for learning and making changes.

Theme 3: An Embedded Value

In a community that supports and nurtures ongoing learning and improvement, where dialogue and decisions maintain a focus on increasing student learning and achievement, school staff value and appreciate their direct involvement in increasing student learning and improving their school. Little (1997) found evidence suggesting that the value of professional learning communities comes from the staff being as deeply teacher-focused as they are student-focused. One cannot assume that schools can transform themselves into productive and successful places of learning for students without first addressing the learning that must occur among teachers. In professional learning communities, teacher development and improvement are acknowledged as a critical component of bringing quality learning experiences to the classroom. Thus, when teachers in professional learning communities are provided the support and development they need for their own learning to improve their classroom practice, significant value is placed on the effect continuous learning has on their work.

Theme 4: Interdependence among the Five Dimensions

A professional learning community exists when each of the five dimensions (Hord, 1997) – supportive and shared leadership, shared visions and values, collective learning and application of learning, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice – are in place and working together. The five dimensions are not discrete, nor does each exist in a vacuum. Rather, they are deeply intertwined, having impact on, and impacting, each other. These interrelationships are noted on the Professional Learning Community Indicators matrix (Figure 2). Examples of the dimensions, and how each plays a part in the development of the others, is noted on the horizontal rows. The ways in which one dimension is impacted or influenced by the other four dimensions can be noted by looking down the vertical columns.

The matrix is a visual depiction, showing how each of the dimensions of a professional learning community is dependent on the others. While there are various “starting points” in developing professional learning communities, the infrastructure itself is not dependent on one individual, one program, or new curriculum. In developing professional learning communities, principals are able to move beyond the role of the traditional principal to one that actively shares leadership, and encourages collective learning among teachers. The teachers within such a structure accept the leadership roles, participate and find value in collective learning and problem solving, and apply those learning experiences to their teaching practice. Just as each dimension is impacted by the other four, teachers and administrators must form a working relationship with the common goal of increasing student learning.

The strength of relationships between administrators and staff, and among staff members, is the underpinning of all five dimensions of professional learning communities. Progress is made when administrators and teachers find ways to go beyond the traditional structures of schools by learning together, and

applying research-based teaching practices, working toward the common goal of increasing student learning. Principals and teachers both play major roles in this endeavor.

First Steps

Although much discussion and reporting on the subject of professional learning communities has taken place, there are few models and little clear information to guide the creation of such communities within school organizations. Even the work done at SEDL over the last three years is limited in its conclusions.

However, initial strategies that are important to share with other educators interested in developing professional learning communities within their schools have been identified.

Determine School and Staff Readiness

Whether you are a principal or an external change facilitator who would like to develop a professional learning community within a school, one of the first steps to consider is an assessment of readiness.

To define the term “readiness,” picture two schools. In School A, block scheduling provides most teachers some common daily planning/work time. The principal is well respected by staff, and many of the staff interact professionally with each other. Some teachers have been asked in the past to be part of decision-making committees or problem-solving groups, and the staff as a whole communicates a general philosophy of doing what is best for the students.

On the other hand, School B uses a traditional schedule that provides little time for teachers’ common planning and requires teachers to use some of that time to monitor duty stations (recess, lunch, before/after school). The principal is seen as an authoritarian, making decisions that are accepted by staff without question or comment. Not all teachers know each other’s names, and members of the staff limit their interactions to those teachers with whom they share location or grade level. When asked about their guiding vision, staff members read the district mission statement from the front cover of their grade books.

School A is at a higher state of readiness for developing a professional learning community than School B for several reasons: (1) the block scheduling already provides time for teachers to work together on a regular basis, (2) the principal has shown a willingness to share leadership and decision making in the past, (3) staff are collegial, respecting each other and their administrator, and (4) all staff can communicate a common value and focus on student learning, even though a vision may not have been “officially” developed.

School B, however, has several issues that will affect attempts to nurture a professional learning community. Time for teachers to work together appears to be significantly limited; the principal does not understand the philosophy of shared leadership or show any desire to do so; staff do not display collegial relationships with one another; and it is unclear whether the staff have similar goals as educators of children. These are important issues that need to be addressed by a change facilitator who is hoping to help nurture a professional learning community in a school such as this one. In terms of readiness, this school *can* become a professional learning community, but it will take a great deal of dedication and patience on the part of all involved, as well as a significant amount of time to take even small steps.

Assessing readiness provides opportunity for one to take note of the barriers that limit previous or current improvement efforts, as well as the strengths, or “boosters,” that can nurture the development of community. The methods for determining readiness, or whether a school is a strong candidate for developing a professional learning community, will vary with the role of the change facilitator.

For external facilitators, readiness may be determined after engaging in interviews and conversations with the principal, teachers, and central office administrators. Internal facilitators, or those who are already familiar with the

school and/or the staff, may not need to conduct interviews, but they can benefit from talking with staff at all levels. In analyzing the data gathered in the conversations through the lenses of the professional learning community dimensions, facilitators can glean rich information regarding patterns of growth, perceived barriers or obstacles, and historical background – familiarizing themselves with the general strengths and needs of the school and staff.

The openness and availability of the principal is a significant indicator of readiness at a school. The principal's role is a critical one, needed to orchestrate the delicate balance of support and pressure while letting go of old paradigms regarding the role of school administrator. Significant endorsement and belief in the strength of professional learning communities is necessary from the principal in order to bear the weight of responsibility that comes with encouraging people to change. If principals do not communicate belief in the power of a professional learning community infrastructure, or cannot support shared leadership and decision making, they should be considered to be at a low readiness level. Efforts to create a professional learning community will falter if those beliefs are left unaddressed.

The overall climate of acceptance, growth, and learning among teachers is another important facet of readiness. The development of professional learning communities in the SEDL studies hinged on the level of trust and respect that had developed within the school community. This is not to say that all teachers must be enthusiastic about making changes; rather, it is an acknowledgment that such efforts will be more of a struggle, and will take more time, if a climate of distrust, disrespect, or disengagement exists. Such issues will need to be addressed and resolved before staff can learn to function as a unit, as a community that values diversity and learning, united in the pursuit of an environment that values hard work, risk taking, and personal growth.

Consider the Use of an External Change Facilitator

Much of an external change facilitator's work with schools developing as professional learning communities centers around becoming acquainted with the school staff and assessing their way of operating as it relates to their school improvement goals. For that matter, change facilitators make an important contribution by assisting staff in bringing a school's disjointed and poorly articulated efforts into alignment, particularly at the beginning of the improvement process.

Change facilitators can also take a "balcony view" (Garmston & Wellman, 1999), a macro-centric view of situations, in which they try, with compassion and detachment, to understand the nature of the existing situation (p. 56). In so doing, facilitators understand the situations and contexts with which school staff are dealing, and can encourage actions of individuals in new roles, helping their school to become a professional learning community. Particularly cognizant of the leadership qualities of the principal, and the extent to which leadership is shared in the school, change facilitators can employ the balcony view to offer the most appropriate support and encouragement to staff in achieving their goals. This perspective also offers change facilitators the opportunity to gain a sense of resources available to the school, as well as the degree to which teachers are committed to learning more about their practice.

Identify Barriers and Boosters

Accessing demographic and achievement test data provides opportunity for a change facilitator to gather information about the student population and levels of achievement, both of which are critical to understanding the current functioning of a school. This particular activity should be one in which the entire faculty is involved, bringing the school staff together to identify the strengths and needs of their students. More often than not, school staff have limited access to, and understanding of, the data available to them. Viewing the school data

together with staff can provide insights to a change facilitator as to how much the staff know about and use data, how receptive they are to learning together, and how the principal interacts with the teachers as an instructional leader.

The issue of time is a major consideration in developing professional learning communities. External facilitators working with a school staff need to visit the school weekly or biweekly in order to nurture and maintain working relationships with the teachers and staff. The dedication of time for school people to learn and share is crucial to the accomplishment of school improvement goals as well. Teachers and administrators need to have adequate time to come together for collective learning, problem solving, and decisionmaking during the school day. Finding a way to set aside this kind of time in schools may be one of the most difficult challenges of school improvement facilitators, whether internal or external to the school or school system. Time, and the use of that time, will always be a factor in the development and continuance of a professional learning community.

It is important to emphasize here that a professional learning community is most successful when it is used as an infrastructure to support a school staff's vision and goals for improvement. The goal is not to "*be* a professional learning community." Instead, the goals ought to be continuous inquiry, continuous improvement, and achievement of school improvement goals. If school staff are more focused on the *becoming* aspect of a professional learning community, then their intent is misaligned with the purpose of the infrastructure. Therefore, the school's vision of school improvement, and its articulation of goals, is crucial to the development of a professional learning community – where the *professionals* come together to *learn* for improvement within a *community* setting.

The transformation of low-performing schools into professional learning communities cannot be accomplished by simply addressing the five dimensions

directly. A culture of collective learning and application is not likely to emerge from a few training sessions, nor will a set of workshops in themselves produce a group of teachers who are comfortable and trusting enough to engage in shared personal practice. Instead, the work of creating professional learning communities is to build and strengthen the capacity of the school staff – teachers and administrator(s) – so that they all share the common goal of ensuring student success and can make continual progress toward that goal. Rather than becoming a reform initiative itself, the professional learning community becomes the supporting structure for schools to continuously transform themselves through their own internal capacity.

Begin with the Learning

The most logical and effective way to begin developing a professional learning community is to bring the professionals together to learn. Hord (1997) asserts that school development and improvement are directly dependent upon teacher development and improvement. Without this critical link, little will change toward bringing quality learning experiences to the classroom. School administrators and staffs that successfully transform themselves into such learning organizations promote the professionalization of teachers and offer improved educational opportunities for students as well.

One powerful strategy is to identify a “problem” and then bring the staff together at regular intervals to learn together how to deal with the problem or goal and engage in dialogue about that learning. Professional development is not limited to a two-and-a-half-hour workshop conducted by someone “brought in” by the district or the school. In professional learning communities, professional development is a regular, if not daily, experience. The educators within a school, teachers and administrators alike, are responsible for their ongoing professional development. It is no longer someone else’s responsibility

to provide staff development to schools. To become a professional learning community, school staff must begin by engaging in learning together.

Once a school has identified its point of focus for improvement, that particular subject can be used as a catalyst for learning. Opportunities for staff to come together to read the research or literature about a specific topic can be structured, and then discussion of the topic supported. As noted in SEDL's studies of schools involved in comprehensive school improvement and in developing a professional learning community, one critical issue facing schools today is the limited time that staff spend together talking about their work. Making time to engage staff in discussions about their learning and teaching practice is imperative. Several of the schools that SEDL studied engaged their staff and administrators in faculty study groups. Another school came together in grade-level groups to learn, discuss, and problem-solve around the implementation of a new curriculum. At a few school sites, the entire faculty began to examine the state standards and the implementation of them in the classroom curriculum. Engaging the staff in ongoing inquiry and learning is the most significant element of successfully creating a professional learning community in any school.

Professional Learning Communities Under Construction

A learning community of professionals in a school represents a viable context in which teachers and administrators can share decisionmaking, collaborate on their practice, and hone their skills to increase student learning. Transforming a school to engage staff in operating this way is neither simple nor easy. It requires significant alteration of both structural and normative aspects of schooling, for the purpose of improving teachers' knowledge and skills so that student learning increases.

While research repeatedly underscores the need for more schools to function as learning communities (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Hord, 1997; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Reyes, Scribner, & Paredes Scribner, 1999; Thiessen & Anderson, 1999), what is not so clear are the specific actions taken to develop such a community within schools.

SEDL researchers have spent the last three years studying the evolution of professional learning communities in schools in order to identify such actions. Five schools were selected for study from across SEDL's five-state region that approximated professional learning communities according to the five dimensions. The schools reflected urban, suburban, and rural settings and represented to a significant extent the diversity of the region that SEDL serves.

Data from each of SEDL's professional learning community study sites were analyzed to identify similarities and differences in the approaches each school took to re-create itself as a community of continuous inquiry and improvement. Researchers were looking specifically at the development of actions and structures that enabled school staff to identify a shared vision, to learn together and make informed decisions collectively, and to collaborate with peers in critically examining the quality of student work.

Significant themes were found across the school sites. While some of these findings are not new to educational research, they are actions of significance among the schools in regard to their development as professional learning communities. The themes reflect the five most salient aspects of professional learning community development in schools where staff have found the means to transform the way they operate. The five themes include the role of the principal, a culture of collaboration, a commitment from all staff, the presence of a catalyst, and the use of a critical friend/change facilitator.

The Role of the Principal

First, principals played an extremely critical role in nurturing the development of professional learning communities by providing conditions and resources to support staff in their continuous learning.

Principals shared decision making with teachers on substantive issues and regarded them as leaders in school improvement efforts. They developed and facilitated organizational structures for teachers to participate in decision making, and they implemented systems for obtaining input from a broad spectrum of the professional staff on a regular basis.

In so doing, the principals kept the vision of what the school was striving to become alive and at the forefront of attention. At one school, the principal repeated the vision statement each day during morning announcements; at another, the principal used the vision to guide staff as they made decisions about staff development and the formation of focus groups. These principals were torchbearers of the vision for improving their schools.

Principals also viewed the professional staff as a resource for school improvement and took steps to increase its leadership capacity. They often encouraged teachers to assume leadership roles in the development of new

programs and activities; involved teachers in decisions on issues such as departmentalization, schedules, faculty study topics, and staff development budgets; and provided data to inform decision making. While expanding the leadership capacity of individuals within the professional staff, they in fact expanded the capacity of the school to successfully address problems and their solutions.

High expectations were held and communicated by principals at each professional learning community site. Sub-par performance (in terms of student learning results) was not acceptable to the principals, and high expectations were modeled throughout the school day. Principals maintained a visible and knowledgeable presence in their schools, interacting with teachers. This enabled them to monitor school issues firsthand. They frequently visited classrooms and were often in the hallways, where they interacted informally with teachers and students. Each principal recognized and reinforced staff efforts by setting a tone of support and encouragement, by upholding teachers' decisions and actions that were in the best interest of their students, and by praising staff frequently.

The conditions and resources to support professional staff in continuous learning and collaboration were provided by the principal. Each of the principals fostered partnerships with external entities so that their school staffs had professional contacts outside of the school and district. The external contacts varied from partnerships with area universities to E-mail correspondence between teachers and other professionals. Several of the principals brought quality professional development opportunities to the campus and allotted the time for teachers to debrief with others after visits to other schools.

Principals also encouraged collaboration among the professional staff by providing time for teachers to meet and discuss issues related to school improvement. In some cases, schedules were arranged to allow teacher teams to

have the same planning period; in others, early release times were negotiated with the district by principals to allow the total staff to come together for planning and learning. Classroom configurations were rearranged at a few of the sites to bring teachers together in closer proximity. For example, at one school the principal moved special education classes from portable buildings to the main building in order to facilitate interactions between special education and regular education teachers.

Finally, principals promoted and encouraged communication among staff through written and oral daily announcements, staff newsletters, and postings on bulletin boards. In addition, some principals arranged to have minutes of meetings distributed to all teachers. Staff reported that they were well informed about school issues and believed that the communication structures fostered coordination of effort and unity of purpose.

A Culture of Collaboration

Staff from each of the schools reported that organizational structures existed to support them in their collaborative planning and learning together. The time provided to teachers on a regular basis, and in sufficient quantity, allowed them to discuss issues in both breadth and depth and to engage in meaningful and shared learning.

The organizational and physical structures that supported teacher collaboration varied. Grade-level meetings allowed teachers to plan instructional activities together and to discuss common issues. Teachers also met in cross-grade teams to collaborate within discipline areas, for example to discuss curriculum concerns. At one school, “design teams” were authorized to make school decisions on behalf of the total staff. Because time was allotted to these activities, teachers had regular and ongoing opportunities to problem-solve around critical issues, and to engage in whole-staff learning and reflection about their work. At

each campus, teachers were committed to using the time they had in a productive way, and furthermore, they had a plan for doing so.

In professional learning communities, a spirit of professional respect and trust motivates teachers to work together on school improvement initiatives. Teachers view themselves and their colleagues as members of a team of professionals who can, by working in concert and in support of one another, address the challenges that face the school. Teachers collaborate on issues directly related to student learning. At two of the campuses, teachers worked together on curriculum concerns. Others reported faculty study topics and more generalized staff development on issues directly related to student learning. Teachers monitored the implementation of improvement initiatives and/or innovations on a regularly scheduled basis.

Professional staff in learning communities understand the importance of communication with one another, as well as with others outside the school. While formal communication strategies were employed – i.e. minutes of meetings, bulletin boards, weekly newsletters to staff, and so on – the informal communication that also occurred was equally valuable. Teachers valued casual exchanges with each other in unstructured settings and found that such interactions significantly reduced the isolation that they often feel and strengthened the professional and personal relationships across the staff. Staff also utilized various modes of communication with parents and community members. Newsletters, parent conferences, and telephone contacts were customary forms of communication. Teachers at one school reported making home visits to help them better understand the social and economic environments from which their students came.

In these professional learning communities, teachers supported one another's improving professional practice. In most cases, teachers made informal visits to

colleagues' classrooms and engaged in group discussions. Teachers sought advice and opinions about effective approaches to working with students and about sharing instructional materials. One campus was even beginning to implement a more formalized system of collegial support, with a core group of teachers willing to act as "critical friends" for one another.

The professional trust and respect that pervaded the campuses strengthened the staffs' unquestioned commitment to school improvement initiatives and allowed teachers to take risks in implementing new strategies. It created a culture in which teachers were willing to represent their peers in making decisions that affected the entire faculty and to critically evaluate the success of their improvement efforts. Teachers were often willing to meet after school hours to plan and complete tasks. At one school, teachers reported that they considered their professional colleagues as friends and often interacted with them on a personal level beyond the school day.

A Commitment from All Staff

Within these professional learning communities, teachers and administrators held themselves accountable to students, parents, community, and one another. Principals held high expectations for their teachers by asking them to serve on decision-making teams and to acquire the information necessary for themselves and others to make sound instructional decisions. Teachers were expected to grow professionally; many developed professional growth plans and portfolios that reflected the goals of the school and their desire continually to improve instruction. Principals asked teachers to participate in grade-level and subject-area meetings, communicating with colleagues about teaching and learning decisions and practice. In effect, principals expected their staff to be leaders in every sense of the word, holding themselves responsible for making the best possible decisions for their students, and the teachers rose to the expectation.

Teachers, in turn, held the same expectations for themselves. Their focus on students, student learning, and student needs was clear to all who entered the school. Hard work was a norm at these sites, where staff regularly committed long hours to planning, both independently and collaboratively, for each day of teaching. Teachers responded to the call of decisionmaking by contributing thoughtfully and purposefully to the decisions made for their campuses, holding up the school's vision as a filter for all decisions, working together toward a common goal.

Immense value was placed on teachers' learning for improvement in professional learning communities, evidenced by a dedication to regular planning times with grade-level or subject-level groups, where teachers discussed strategies, shared ideas, planned and solved problems. Teachers responded positively to opportunities for self-analysis, assessing and monitoring student progress to get continuously better at doing what was best for their students' learning. The emphases on continuous learning and accountability to themselves and their students led to the incorporation of the school vision for teachers' professional development. Staff voluntarily participated in, and in some cases created, opportunities for faculty studies and continuous learning for teaching and administrative staff. Interdependence among teachers was supported and contributed to a stronger, better-functioning staff. Teachers found solutions by learning and working together toward a common goal, realizing that learning and change take time and effort. Staff in professional learning communities dedicate themselves to such learning, where it becomes embedded in the values and norms schoolwide.

The Presence of a Catalyst

External factors can serve as significant catalysts in the development of professional learning communities. Whether it was the establishment of a partnership with a university or the reorganization of a school or district,

external factors caused a change of focus to occur in four of the five schools in this study. Reorganizations allowed the principals of two of the schools in the study to hire a majority of their current staff, which leads to speculation that the principal looked specifically for teachers who would understand and support the school's growth toward a professional learning community. The adoption of a new curriculum enhanced collaboration among staff at two of the schools, which ultimately fostered a more interactive, collegial community in their work toward school improvement.

In these situations, the importance of strong leadership within a school community was clearly evidenced. While the catalysts were not necessarily negative or dramatic, they effectively served as a means for identifying a new focus for teachers and administrators. In each event, the principal provided the insight and leadership to seize the catalyst as an opportunity for change. The events provided each principal an opportunity to alter the direction of the school significantly, and each principal accepted the terms of such a challenge with foresight and determination. Most important, the leadership in these schools was critical in creating the support and structures necessary for growth and development of the staff in this new direction.

The Use of Change Facilitators

Change facilitators encouraged, supported, and participated in strategies enabling school staffs to plan together or to talk with one another about their work. Working directly with teachers rather than only through or with the administration communicated that the change facilitator was willing to get at the center of the school change, by looking at what teachers do in their classrooms. Offering processes to bring teachers together to discuss issues of concern, studying and learning alongside teachers about new practices, and modeling one's own interest in learning by being directly involved with teachers

communicates a message to school staff about the importance of their efforts in developing as a professional learning community.

Change facilitators were able to clarify how a staff's actions supported the values to which they were committed. The people in this role also assisted administrators and staff in redirecting their focus upon what they believed to be possible, identifying resources that could help them achieve their goals, and reducing distractions that might get them off course.

Final Thoughts

Professional learning communities are a balance between organizational structure and productive, substantive use of that organization and time. The principal's role is a critical one, orchestrating a delicate balance between support and pressure, encouraging teachers to take on new roles while they themselves let go of old paradigms regarding the role of school administrator.

As educators are continually striving to provide appropriate learning environments for children, so too must we be cognizant of providing similar environments for our teachers. In this paper, we have shared SEDL's learning regarding the need for communities of continuous inquiry and improvement, as well as the structures and conditions that are required to nurture the development of professional learning communities in schools. It is hoped that these findings will be pushed forward in the field, identifying more strategies for school staffs to use in advancing toward development of communities of continuous inquiry and improvement, and improving student learning in their schools.

References

- Carmichael, L. (1982, October). Leaders as learners: A possible dream. *Educational Leadership*, 40(1), 58 – 59.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1996, March). The quiet revolution: Rethinking teacher development. *Educational Leadership*, 53(6), 4-10.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1998). Teachers and teaching: Testing policy hypotheses from a national commission report. *Educational Researcher*, 27(1), 5-15.
- DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Bloomington, IN: National Education Service.
- Eastwood, K., & Louis, K. (1992). Restructuring that lasts: Managing the performance dip. *Journal of School Leadership*, 2(2), 213-224.
- Elmore, R. F. (2000). *Building a new structure for school leadership*. Washington, D.C.: Albert Shanker Institute.
- Fullan, M. G., & Miles, M. B. (1992). Getting reform right: What works and what doesn't. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 73(10), 744-752.
- Garmston, R. J., & Wellman, B. M. (1999). *The Adaptive School: A sourcebook for developing collaborative groups* (p. 56). Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.
- Hord, S. M. (1992). *Facilitative leadership: The imperative for change*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Hord, S. M. (1997). *Professional learning communities: Communities of continuous inquiry and improvement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Lee, V. E., Smith, J. B., & Croninger, R. G. (1995, Fall). Another look at high school restructuring. *Issues in restructuring schools*. Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Leithwood, K., & Louis, K. S. (1998). Organizational learning in schools: An introduction. In K. Leithwood & K. S. Louis (Eds.), *Organizational learning in schools* (pp. 1-14). Lisse, the Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger.

- Leo, T., & Cowan, D. (2000). Launching professional learning communities: Beginning actions. *Issues...about Change*, 8(1).
- Little, J. W. (1997). *Excellence in professional development and professional community*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.
- Martel, L. D. (1993, June). Building a learning community: School leaders and their organizations need to share a vision to challenge all young minds. *School Administrator*, 50(6), 22-27.
- Morrissey, M. S. (2000). Comprehensive school improvement: Addressing the challenges. *Issues...about Change*, 9(1).
- Newmann, F. M., & Wehlage, G. G. (1995). *Successful school restructuring*. Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Reyes, P., Scribner, J. D., & Paredes Scribner, A. (Eds.). (1999). *Lessons from high-performing Hispanic schools: Creating learning communities*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York: Doubleday Currency.
- Senge, P. (2000). *Schools that learn: A fifth discipline fieldbook for educators, parents, and everyone who cares about education*. New York: Doubleday Currency.
- Sirotnik, K. A. (1999). Making sense of educational renewal. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80(8), 606-610.
- Smylie, M. A., & Hart, A. W. (1999). School leadership for teacher learning and change: A human and social capital development perspective. In J. Murphy & K. S. Louis (Eds.), *Handbook of research on educational administration* (2nd Ed., pp. 421-441). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Thiessen, D., & Anderson, S. E. (1999, April). *Transforming learning communities: Getting into the habit of change in Ohio schools – The cross-case study of 12 transforming learning communities*. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.
- Wald, P. J., & Castleberry, M. S. (Eds.). (2000). *Educators as learners: Creating a professional learning community in your school*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.