

Preface

Internal capacity building, the effort to promote teachers as experts, is more than a buzzword. Most districts want it but do not know how to support it. Some districts are not certain that it is possible to develop it. Others have modestly developed it but do not know how to harness or expand it.

Capacity building is about enabling good teachers and administrators to share and disseminate their expertise in an environment that is both rigorous and supportive. It is about securing sufficient time and space for these educators to produce quality work and reflect on their practice. It is about developing learning communities where groups of teachers and administrators ponder and analyze students' work to identify and monitor their needs. It is about fostering shared leadership and creating expert teams that are able to tackle the complex aspects of schools, including the standards and tests required by a particular district or state.

This is not easy to do. Often schools do not function in ways that develop staff's capacity to learn and grow. Norms of individualism tend to prevail over collaborative problem solving and inquiry; innovations are adopted quickly but are seldom carried through implementation in any complete way; staff is divided into cliques; and administrative policies focus on short-term and immediate problems. Schools rely too much on outside experts, an expensive and not usually enduring way to develop teacher expertise.

The main premise of this book is that schools can engage in activities that support the development of learning communities by identifying and maximizing teachers' expertise. Learning communities are critical if schools want to increase their organizational capacity to improve student learning (Newmann, Secada, & Wehlage, 1995). These communities need to treat teachers and administrators as learners because such treatment has been linked to the creation of learning organizations (Argyris & Schon, 1978). When these activities are centered on standards-based curriculum and assessment design, data-driven inquiry, and portfolio development, they can enhance teachers' practices, increase student learning, and produce concrete and valuable school products and processes.

The book's chapters address four basic questions about capacity building:

1. How do we develop learning communities that embrace the notion of "teachers teaching teachers"?
2. How do we operationalize a standards-based and learner-centered curriculum so that all teachers will understand what it entails?

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3. How do we enable teachers to pursue questions of great significance about their practice?
4. How can we use professional portfolios as frameworks for documenting professional expertise?

In Chapter 1, I examine learning communities as a construct that has great potential but is very fragile. Teachers and the administrators who work with them must form active communities to build expertise, to examine important questions related to school life, and to nurture the permanent effort to help school communities keep questioning, learning, and growing. These communities are critical if any educational reform effort is to be sustained (Louis, Kruse, & Marks, 1996). Examples of learning communities and how they work are included.

In Chapter 2, I address standards-based curriculum and assessment design with particular emphasis on how to focus on standards with rigor and time-tested best practices (Newmann & Associates, 1996). I have included three specific teaching units and supporting material that illustrate the use of such practices and underscore the real expertise that some teachers have and that is worth cultivating in many more.

Chapter 3 examines action research and data-driven inquiry as processes that teachers and administrators can use to examine their practice through individual questions or through collaborative work. These processes are intrinsic to the cultivation of systematic inquiry and reflection, which, in turn, has a positive effect on teachers and students. Many questions can be addressed throughout the year, and this chapter will show how, exactly, to do this.

Chapter 4 looks at professional portfolios that reflect the complexity of teaching and the work of teachers. Understanding and honoring such complexity is important if we want to cultivate effective practice. Some attention is also paid to the work of administrators and in-house staff developers. The chapter addresses the materials that can be collected to aid educators in reflecting the richness of their practice. It also discusses the organizational structures and frameworks that can assist teachers and administrators in the development of their professional portfolios. Finally, it discusses strategies for using a portfolio as a tool for monitoring and improving professional decisions rather than as a document that stands separately from one's practice. Sample portfolio materials are shown and examined.

The final chapter provides some guidelines for the development of an action plan centered on the design of standards-based curriculum and assessment, individual and collaborative inquiry, and professional portfolios.

The material in this book is aimed at teachers, professional developers, and school administrators. Teachers can benefit from the frameworks, templates, and examples that support each of the chapters and use them to determine the value and implications surrounding the use of teacher-designed standards-based curriculum and assessment, data-driven inquiry, and professional portfolios.

Professional developers can use the material in the book to guide or refine their staff development activities and to consider the role of explicit reflection and ongoing documentation in the design and sustainability of teachers' work toward the goal of school improvement.

The book may be useful to school administrators who want to explore the conditions that are needed for teachers to develop quality materials and processes and the benefits that are derived from this endeavor.

These chapters are intended to serve as models for what groups of educators, not an individual teacher, can do to fill in the curriculum gap between standards we want for our students and the curriculum and instruction we use to support them. Figuring out how to create communities of adult learners, how to bring the standards alive, how to design rigorous and meaningful learning experiences, how to reflect on one's work, how to solve learning problems and overcome classroom obstacles, and how to work on all these things and more is the task teachers face. Unless we face this challenge, we will not get past business as usual in schools.

Each school or district must consider how best to use professional development time and money. Of course, some schools are more interested in portfolios, and others are more interested in standards-based design, action research, or something else. I well understand that the amount of time and money a district can devote to professional development will vary, but the days of no or little professional development are over. We now need to consider how to invest in professional development that produces the kinds of changes we want to see in classrooms. No school or district can rely on textbooks or commercial materials exclusively or even in large part if it is to be taken seriously about wanting rich curriculum to support the standards that have been established in the past 10 years. Nor can it rely on the typical 1 or 2 days for professional development aimed at all teachers but suited to none.

The material in this book is based on work completed in the past several years at the Center for the Study of Expertise in Teaching and Learning (CSETL), a nonprofit center whose mission is to identify, package, and disseminate teaching expertise. This center grew out of my work with many teachers who had participated in comprehensive professional development programs that I led from 1992 to 1997. In such programs, I discovered an unbelievable amount of talent that was mostly known and appreciated by the students who had the privilege of being taught by those who possessed it. Without legitimate career ladders where the expertise of teachers, administrative staff, and professional developers could be captured, shared, and disseminated, I had to create a forum that would honor what could be deemed the wisdom of practice. CSETL provides educators with a professional forum for collaborative research, development, and reflection. It also serves as a catalyst that enables its fellows to assume leadership positions within their districts and beyond. See Appendix A for more information about CSETL.

Environments such as the ones created by CSETL can exist in schools and can become part of the fabric of school life. However, unless more schools and districts appreciate the necessity to cultivate and honor the expertise of those who teach, we will need to support more expensive and less accurately targeted organizations that are committed to identifying, packaging, and disseminating general best practice.

The overarching essential question of the book is "Can we develop a school's capacity to become a learning community?" In light of the historically poor use of externally driven professional development for teachers, I believe we cannot afford not to.

This book proposes that capacity building is possible and that it may be cultivated within a segment of a school or as a schoolwide endeavor. My approach is guided by four assumptions:

1. *Schools can become better at identifying and using their own professional expertise.*

Professional development is, in most districts, a commodity in short supply. It is an insignificant percentage of a school's budget and is too often poorly linked to the specific needs of teachers who receive it. Professional development that is imported from the outside

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can, at its best, introduce new ideas and mobilize the beginnings of change. The more typical professional development scenario is the introduction of new ideas and skills without the appropriate support mechanisms to implement them. Studies have shown that staff development activities undertaken in isolation from teachers' ongoing classroom responsibilities rarely have much impact on teaching practices or on student learning (Doyle & Ponder, 1977; Guskey & Sparks, 1996). To have an impact on practice, professional development programs must offer teachers ways of building on and refining their practices to directly enhance desired learning outcomes in students.

What is required is an initial solid introduction to a new concept or skill followed by ongoing and job-embedded professional development sessions over time. There is increasing evidence (Bain & Jacobs, 1990; Stronge, 2002) that high-quality professional development activities are necessary tools for improving teaching effectiveness and that teacher effectiveness is positively correlated to increased student learning (Brophy & Good, 1986; Collinson, Killeavy, & Stephenson, 1999; Covino & Iwanicki, 1996; Cruickshank & Haefele, 2001; Mitchell, 1998; Rowan, Chiang, & Miller, 1997). Effective teachers appear to be effective with students of all achievement levels, regardless of the level of heterogeneity in their classrooms (Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997).

Professional development activities are most effective when they are collegial and challenging because learning itself involves these characteristics. Staff development programs concerning new programs and innovations are most successful when teachers can regularly discuss their experiences in an atmosphere of collegiality and experimentation. For most teachers, having the opportunity to share perspectives and seek solutions to common problems is extremely beneficial (Little, 1981).

There are teachers in every school with well-developed talents. In some cases, these talents are modest and focused, as in knowing how to help students take notes in different ways. In others, they are broad and more significant, as in the case of teachers who know and can develop different kinds of learning experiences for students with a wide range of needs. Rarely is a teacher an expert in every area. However, if schools knew and sought to identify different kinds of expertise among their teaching staff, they would probably find that they had much of the expertise they needed, or at least a lot more than what they thought they had. For the rest, small teams of teachers can be prepared by experts and can then, in turn, share their expertise with the rest of the staff via study groups, collegial circles, or action research endeavors.

2. *Standards-based design is an effective means of revisiting, improving, and refining curriculum, instruction, and assessment.*

The advent of standards at the state and national levels has provided schools with the opportunity to revisit teachers' curriculum and assessment practices that may otherwise remain unchanged. Standards can easily become the catalyst that enables teachers in different grades and subjects to identify what is essential and discard old baggage.

Standards-based design is efficient and parsimonious (Martin-Kniep, 2000; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). By designing backwards, teachers can identify specific standards and indicators from different content areas and then select lessons and assessments that directly relate to and support students' learning and attainment of these standards. Over time, they can reorganize what originally may be perceived as a wide range of disparate and unconnected content into a relatively small number of well-organized units.

The opportunity to carefully consider standards as the foundation for design enables teachers to make meaningful connections between curriculum, instruction, and assessment and, in so doing, to articulate their teaching to maximize student learning.

3. *A significant wealth of knowledge about teaching and learning is best understood by those who teach every day, namely classroom teachers.*

Teachers understand and experience the learning process from within. They face the uncertainties of learning when an apparently well-thought-out set of activities is misunderstood by the students who experience it; when, in answering a question, students make unrelated connections and acquire surprising insights; or when students demonstrate profound insights about fairly new content.

Given the appropriate conditions, teachers can greatly inform what we know about how and when students learn. In fact, there is growing evidence (Stiegler & Herbert, 1999) that if we truly want to improve schools, teachers must be at the heart of change efforts. “Not only are they the gatekeepers for all improvement efforts, they are also in the best position to acquire the knowledge that is needed. They are, after all, the only ones who can improve teaching” (p. 174).

Other scholars (Fullan, 1994; Guskey, 1986; Marantz Cohen, 2002) assert that without a deeper and broader conceptualization of teacher leadership, efforts to develop it in schools will fail.

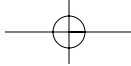
The conditions that support the development and use of teachers’ expertise include the opportunity for teachers to investigate their own practice using action research and other forms of systematic inquiry. They also include the opportunity for teachers to engage in collaborative discourse around issues of substance, as well as ponder such essential questions about teaching and learning as the following:

1. What content and skills are essential? What content and skills are expendable?
2. How do we identify, use, and adapt the most appropriate curriculum, assessment, and instructional strategies to address the needs of increasingly diverse learners?
3. How do we balance the need to help students do well on state and other standardized tests without compromising curriculum integrity?

Learning communities can be created by educators who exercise leadership in the design, investigation, and dissemination of their expertise and who actively participate in their own learning process. These educators may include teachers, professional developers, administrators, and university professors. According to Swanson (2000), these leaders employ five practices. They (a) challenge the process; (b) inspire a shared vision; (c) enable others to act; (d) model the way; and (e) encourage the heart. These are key characteristics of dynamic learning communities.

4. *Professional portfolios legitimize and validate teachers’ expertise.*

Teaching involves a range of skills, content expertise, and dispositions that requires a multifaceted documentation system. Such a system should allow for the documentation of teaching processes, performances, and products. Professional portfolios can support this system. They can also offer teachers a vehicle for shaping and personalizing the documentation and analysis of their thinking processes and professional values. By enabling teachers and



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other educators to explicitly reflect on their practice, portfolios can play a critical role in enhancing professional change. Theorists of adult learning have emphasized reflection as a means of achieving transformative learning and more radical approaches to the curriculum and its outcomes (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Boud & Walker, 1998; Thomas & Montgomery, 1998).

Portfolios need to strike a balance between being comprehensive and being realistic. They cannot be so burdensome that teachers simply won't do them or find them helpful. When portfolios are used to document as well as share knowledge, thinking processes, and accomplishments, they can provide a means for capturing professional decisions, goals, and questions that often remain hidden or unrecognized. In a sense, portfolios can become the filing and organizing system for design and inquiry activities. In addition, they can uncover the processes surrounding such activities and the thinking behind them.

