Diane R. Wood

Professional Learning Communities: Teachers, Knowledge, and Knowing

This article explores how knowledge can be built and shared in teachers' learning communities. The author creates two portraits of learning communities in action and contrasts them. Because teachers need to be knowledgeable in ever-changing contexts, ongoing professional learning simply must be part-and-parcel of their work. But how teacher learning is conceived and practiced constructs the relationship between teachers and knowledge. Should teachers be passive recipients of others' expertise? Should they be researchers, scholars, theorizers? The author suggests teacher learning communities offer the opportunity to recapture a Deweyan approach to teacher professionalism, one that involves systematic observations and analyses of classrooms and student work and ongoing collegial dialogue. At the heart of the author's argument is a vision of teachers not only as users of pedagogical knowl-edge, but also as creators, disseminators, and preservers of it.

Diane R. Wood is an Associate Professor of Education at the University of Southern Maine.

Correspondence should be sent to Diane R. Wood, University of Southern Maine, 118 Bailey Hall, Gorham, ME 04038. E-mail: drwood@usm.maine.edu

IN FITS AND STARTS THROUGHOUT the history of education in the United States, reformers have turned critical gazes on teachers' learning in schools. There is widening consensus that the quality of students' educational experiences depends most of all on the quality of teachers. People may differ about how to ensure "quality," but most would agree that quality teachers know how to craft engaging and effective learning experiences, despite constant changes in student populations. They need to be knowledgeable and they need to know how to use their knowledge. Ongoing professional learning simply must be integral to their work. Reformers differ widely, however, on types of professional learning. Should teachers be trained in so-called best practices, coached by mentors, or in-serviced by outside experts? Should they take college courses? Should they be engaged in peer observations, teacher research,

or study groups? The list of recommendations is long.

Ultimately, who makes decisions among these alternatives and what they decide have reverberating consequences. Decisions like these, after all, constitute professional identities and define roles and responsibilities (Hargreaves, 1998; Wood, 2007). More important, how teacher learning is conceived and practiced constructs relationship between teachers and knowledge. Should teachers be passive recipients of others' expertise? Are they possessors of tacit knowledge built from practice? Should they be researchers, scholars, theorizers?

Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in what Dewey (1970) imagined years ago—a laboratory model for schools where teachers engage in collective inquiry in order to weigh their practices and innovations against empirical evidence and critical dialogue. Built on his broad conception of science and empirical data, Dewey's approach included systematic observations and analyses, conducted by teachers, of learning and teaching in classrooms. The process, he argued, ought to include focused professional conversations among colleagues, which in turn stimulate innovation and further inquiry. This spiraling process would culminate in ongoing construction of knowledge from practice. Schaefer (1967) conjured a similar vision with his "schools as centers of inquiry" where pedagogical knowledge, tailored to a particular context and population, would be continually developed by teachers. Building on contemporary management theory, Senge and his colleagues (2000) echo Dewey and Schaefer and paint vivid scenes of teachers intellectually invigorated by shared goals and collective inquiry. Increasingly, literature abounds recommending collegial communities of teachers who learn together for the sake of improving student learning (Calderwood, 2000; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; McDonald, 2003). These arguments offer a vision of teachers not only as users of pedagogical knowledge, but also as creators of it.

I have a story to tell about teachers creating local knowledge together. For five years, I followed a mid-Atlantic urban school district—Hillsboro—where an innovative superintendent tried to establish learning communities as organizational structure for teacher learning. During that time, I made several (3 to 4) three-day trips to Hillsboro each academic year. I interviewed the original superintendent, district office administrators, principals, and teachers multiple times. I observed the district's fledgling learning communities in action and visited participants' classrooms. Over time, the original superintendent moved to another job, her successor stepped down amidst public scandal, and a third took office, establishing professional development priorities that did not include learning communities. Thus, I alternated between a sweeping view of district involvement (Wood, 2007) and a microcosmic view of an elementary school in an exceptionally poor neighborhood.

Like any narrator, I can frame this story from differing vantage points, foregrounding certain aspects while relegating others to the background. Heeding Giroux's (1997) and Rose's (1999) call to illuminate constructive possibilities, I have chosen to tell the microcosmic story even as I recognize generalizations to other settings are not possible. I do so, however, because it is a hopeful story. I am unconvinced that the world needs yet another account of a defeated effort to "scale up" school reform. It does need, however, robust descriptions of caring teachers going about hard intellectual work to improve student learning, teachers taking responsibility for what they know and what they need to learn. This is "social science that matters," (Flyvbjerg, 2001) or research that discloses practical wisdom about the common good, like opening access to education for populations of children so often failed by public education. The teachers of Lincoln Elementary, with varying success, undertook this difficult work, still clinging to their learning communities even as the larger district moved on to other things.

The Background

The story began 6 years ago when Hillsboro's visionary new superintendent decided to apply

for a 3-year grant from the Lucent Technologies Foundation to join in a professional development initiative aimed at establishing learning communities as the organizational structure for teacher learning. Selected as one of four pilot districts in the nation, Hillsboro located its initiative in five schools, three elementary schools and one middle school in poor neighborhoods, and also in the only comprehensive high school. Teachers met in collaborative groups, dubbed Lucent Learning Communities (LLCs), during the school day as Lucent funds paid for substitutes or schools managed to schedule them or provide early-release days.

The Foundation contracted with the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) to introduce district leaders—both administrators and teacher leaders—to a series of protocols that structure productive conversations within a realistic time frame. Protocols ranged in purposes: looking at student work, analyzing dilemmas of practice, assessing value of lessons, etc. The trained teachers became *internal coaches* for the LLCs. Each district also had an *external coach*, a NSRF member who mentored the internal coaches through monthly on-site visits. Throughout their involvement with Hillsboro, NSRF trainers and coaches described LLCs as "your groups." Participants were to set agendas. LLCs were, in part, a teacher empowerment project, designed to help teachers develop greater efficacy and take more responsibility for student learning.

The Foundation also contracted with a documentation team. I became lead documenter in Hillsboro during the second year. I interviewed two district administrators about LLCs toward the end of the sixth year. The first said, "We don't have groups actually called LLCs any more, but LLC work is embedded in everything we do in professional development." When I asked her what she meant by "LLC work," she mentioned that groups used protocols. When I pressed further, it became clear that administrators set LLC agendas and that protocols were used to "get people on board with initiatives." Protocols were no longer seen as tools for teachers to move productively through their own agendas but to advance a district agenda. When I asked a second

administrator, he said, "They [the LLCs] are pretty much gone. At a district level, they just don't exist anymore. There are a few pockets here and there. Oh sure, we use protocols sometimes, but LLCs are gone."

One of the "pockets" referred to was Lincoln Elementary School. Lincoln, an original pilot school, is in the poorest neighborhood in Hillsboro, serving 625 students, kindergarten through fifth grade. Students are primarily African American and Hispanic although there are some children of Asian and European descent. Many are English language learners. Lincoln has struggled with low student achievement, as measured by standardized test scores, and has been under close scrutiny by district and state officials. Over the last few years, however, school scores have begun to climb. In fact, a teacher wrote me at the end of my fourth year of documentation, "I just had to email you with the amazing news.... Our 5th grade team at Lincoln did it! We made AYP (Annual Yearly Progress)!"

Teacher as Learners and Knowers

When Lincoln Elementary's principal, Alice, heard about the Lucent initiative, she signed up for coaches' training. Drawn to the idea of learning communities focused on improving teaching and learning, she was eager to have her school involved. Teachers working together to pose, analyze, and find solutions to professional problems was exactly what she had been trying to foster. As far as she was concerned, "as long as the teachers hold to a focus on student learning," they could tackle any topics they deemed important.

Hargreaves (1994) has claimed that *knowledge societies*, like our own, need schools that are sites for knowledge construction with teachers placed at the center of that effort. Similarly, Schön's (1983) call for *reflective practitioners* asks teachers to be far more than technicians implementing others' ideas. Instead, they must be thinkers, inquirers, and conceptualizers. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) lay out a taxonomy of the types of knowledge necessary for the

complex art of teaching: *knowledge-for-practice* emanating from outside experts; *knowledge-in-practice* built—often unconsciously—as teachers go about their work; and *knowledge-of-practice* which is deliberate construction of knowledge by communities of teachers drawing on both outside experts and inquiry into daily practice.

Contemporary reform literature calling for learning communities (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Lieberman & Wood, 2003) builds on the idea of knowledge-of-practice. Teacher learning communities, such as professional networks, critical friends groups, study groups, and teacher research collaboratives, provide settings for teachers to learn and build knowledge together. Teachers are not simply constructed as learners; they also become knowers. Learning communities offer opportunities to tap teachers' *tacit knowledge* (Elbaz, 1983; Schön, 1983) and make it public to be shared and critiqued. Over time, schools become places not only for learning but also for deliberate construction and dissemination of knowledge borne of research.

Dewey (1970), appreciating hard-won knowledge of the best teachers, wrote about what happens when schools do not operate that way:

> successes of [excellent teachers] tend to be born and die with them: beneficial consequences extend only to those pupils who have personal contact with the gifted teachers. No one can measure the waste and loss that have come from the fact that the contributions of such men and women in the past have been thus confined. (p. 10)

Grumet (1988), drawing from her own experience, made a similar point:

> I mourn every ditto I ever threw away because there was no place to keep it: the notes for the unit we never did, the parody of *The Waste Land* that an eleventh-grade class wrote. I miss the collection of poems that I chose after sitting on the living room couch—Swedish modern it was in those days and not very comfortable—until two or three in the morning. I don't know when I would ever use a collection of poems about cats again, but its absence reminds me

of the childhood charm bracelet that I lost in college.... (p. 92)

Lost expertise, lost curricula, lost inspiration, lost insight—all seem too much a part of school cultures that dismiss teacher knowledge and creativity or have no organizational structure for making it public, critiquing it, refining it, and preserving it.

What Does It Mean to Be a Learning Community?

The following two vignettes, taken from field notes, provide a glimpse into how differently learning communities operated in the district. They offer sharp contrasts to each other. Both take place during the third LLC year, the first at Randolph Middle School and the second at Lincoln Elementary. At Randolph, a dedicated internal coach, Deirdre, focused intensely on community-building as teachers felt beleaguered by low test scores and constant scrutiny. As the grant originally stipulated, Deirdre's LLC brought teachers together once a month across grades, specialties, and assignments.

By contrast, Lincoln's principal, Alice, reconfigured the groups. She wanted to link them more closely with teachers' ongoing work. Thus, she adapted LLC strategies and embedded them in already extant grade-level teams. She explained, "I knew I wasn't going to get anywhere with LLC work over time if teachers didn't see connection to their work." She continued, "Some teachers in this building have a lot of good ideas and they've had successes. I want that shared." Deirdre saw LLCs as a "golden opportunity to get teachers focused on best practices so that they'll stop doing the same old, same old"; Alice saw them as a vehicle for sharing teacher expertise. Meetings reflected these differences. The following provides a look at Randolph's LLC.

Vignette Number 1

A group of 21 sixth, seventh, and eighth grade teachers squeeze into the resource room. The

old brick building is at once dilapidated and charming. Space is at a premium, and teachers struggle to arrange chairs into a circle. It is early Wednesday, and students have left in time to give teachers a two-hour block together. Some teachers eye me—an outsider with a laptop. Eventually, Deirdre introduces me to the group. This starts a dutiful round of introductions. Quick glances at me vary from curious, to resigned, to suspicious.

Introductions completed, Bea, an eighth-grade teacher, says, "We're going to begin with Connections, and I'm going to facilitate it this time. Okay, let's get started." Deirdre whispers in Bea's ear. "Oh wait!" Bea blurts out,

> I forgot to tell you the ground rules. Here they are: It lasts 10 minutes and anyone can say anything they want to share about what's on their minds. You don't have to say anything you don't want to share. We just listen to what people say. We don't respond. Once you've said something, don't say anything else unless everyone has had a chance to talk. I'll give a 2-minute warning at the end and then the people who've talked before can talk again. Everybody ready?

A few murmur affirmation. "Connections is now open," Bea announces.

"I'm thinking about the tests coming up. And now it looks like we might have a snow storm. I guess I'm freaked out because there's so little time."

"I'm wondering if kids feel pressure. Awful to say, but I wish they would. Might motivate them."

"I dug out a science unit I used to do about this time in February. But there's just no way with the tests six weeks away."

"I had a good experience working with kids on rubrics for their practice questions."

"My daughter's coming home from the hospital tomorrow. She's doing better."

A lengthy pause ensues.

"My son is in the National Guard. It looks like his unit's going to be shipped out."

After an even lengthier pause, Bea says, "I like our LLC. Helps me to get to know all of you better."

The process continues. Comments are by turns professional and personal, clustering around common themes: standardized testing, family issues, success or failure with students. Eventually, Bea pronounces, "Connections are now closing."

She sits back. Deirdre takes over,

> Here's a copy of the ground rules for Connections, the protocol we just used. It helps us clear the decks so we can concentrate. It also helps us to know one another better and be sensitive.... Some teachers use Connections to start class. It is a good social skill for kids to learn to listen to one another. Some kids have said it's good to get stuff off their chests and to know people care and won't make fun of them.

Copies of the protocol move around the circle.

"So now we've got to move on to using another kind of protocol. But first, let's all look at our norms." She gestures to a poster hanging on the wall:

- No side bars
- Remember air time
- Be honest
- Remember confidentiality
- Keep focused on kids
- No hierarchy of expertise
- Be respectful

Amy asks, "Any other comments on the norms?" No one volunteers.

Deirdre explains next steps,

> Remember the reflection piece you fill out at the end of meetings? ... Last week a couple of people reflected on how great it would be getting to each other's classrooms. Seems like this group is itching to get into that, so this week I've brought student observation protocols. Then we're actually going to practice ... it's a less threatening process because we're really kid watching and not looking at the teacher.

She distributes the protocol. Several teachers sitting together across from Deirdre mutter something. One rolls her eyes.

A teacher volunteers, "I tried this. I sat in back of Sherri's classroom and used this protocol and it was just an amazing experience watching a kid and seeing things from a kid's perspective...." Deirdre smiles at this testimonial and says, "Yes, I asked Laurie to try it out. I'm glad this worked for you, Laurie. I think it could work for all of us."

Having provided time to review the protocol, Deirdre now asks the group to count off by three "and all ones, twos, and threes get together for about 5 minutes. Look at three roles on the hand-out: court-reporter, focus point, interesting moments. Try to make sense of what each of these roles invites you to do. Then look at the grid which is a way of structuring your observation." The grid suggests three observational modes: (a) a detailed and factual account of what happens, (b) a focused observation through a predetermined lens, and (c) an open-ended observation where the observer is free to write down particularly striking events.

A teacher says, "I have a question about this. We aren't clear about who the 'observed' is. The wording on this protocol needs to be changed; it's very confusing." She moves into her group and Deirdre follows that group and begins explaining. Teachers sitting in all three groups are dutifully filling out grids with descriptors for each kind of evaluation. Eventually, the groups disband and re-form the circle.

Deirdre then asks the group why peer observations might be important to do. There is a lot of generic talk about "improving classroom practice." Beth, one of the four whisperers, pipes in, "Sometimes I think we should just read through protocols like this on our own and discuss them with colleagues we really work with. Then maybe we could go deeper with this.... This all seems kind of trivial." Most of the group glances up at Deirdre. Several teachers nod.

Someone else asks a question about whether or not the protocol allows for asking students questions during a peer observation. Deirdre looks at the protocol, "Well, it doesn't specifi-cally say anything about this, but does anybody have any ideas?" A lingering silence follows. Finally, Deirdre remarks that observations must be "respectful of the teacher in whose classroom the observation is taking place. We need to let the teachers set the ground rules."

Next, Deirdre says,

> We're going to observe Cathy's classroom today, but before we see the video, we're going to role-play a pre-observation. Remember that this has to be on Cathy's terms. It's really her focus that's going to guide us, but we can also be court reporters and we can also take in interesting moments. Before you go into that room, it's really important that you and the teacher you're going to observe spend time together.... Cathy will tell us what she wants us to look for.

During the role-play, Cathy explains,

> You won't see any direct instruction but four or five different 10-minute presentations done by students. There will be a range in terms of quality. Excuse the quality of the video. It wasn't done by professionals [pointing to herself and giggling]. All of this is in Spanish. If you understand Spanish, you'll understand some of the jokes.... I'd like for you to focus on some questions. What did you see the students doing that could be improved upon? And what could I do to prepare them to present? As an aside, I've already decided to make some changes. I'm not going to share them now but it'll be interesting to see if you come up with the same things. Oh, and this is the first time I've done something to this magnitude so please be kind.

Deirdre says quickly, "Cathy, I'm a little worried here. Given your questions, I'm concerned you're going to get evaluative feedback and I'm worried about that...." Cathy laughs and says, "I've been around for a long time. I'm not worried about evaluations." The group laughs. Deirdre persists, "But that's not what this protocol is for. Remember we talked about this?" Cathy says, "Okay, then, let's see. Just tell me what you think the kids are getting out of this. Maybe I'm not really understanding this?

Isn't that what I'm supposed to get out of this—the debriefing phase—what I might be able to change?" Deirdre frowns but nods.

She looks at the group and says, "But remember, making changes isn't the same as evaluating. You say it more like this, "This is what happened this time, but the next time it might be helpful to.... In other words, you're not saying good job or a bad job; you're just saying that it would be helpful to do this differently." Several people comment that they don't see the difference. Deirdre makes a few more comments but cautions time is running out and "we need to get to the video."

As lights dim and the video begins, Cathy calls out, "This really is a big thing for the kids doing these presentations. Try to focus in on kids, and keep in mind how they're doing and how they might be better prepared." The video starts. We see a close up of Cathy explaining the assignment. The students are asked to create an advertisement for an imaginary product in Spanish. She explains that the "benchmark," or standard, is a TV show or play and that she wants their presentations to be "very natural." We watch a succession of students presenting. The teachers take notes on grids. Deirdre suddenly turns the video off, explaining there is little time left. She begins debriefing.

A teacher asks, "So did kids see what you meant by benchmark? Did they see examples of good commercials or scenes from plays?" Cathy responds irritably, "Well, mea culpa. I just thought that everyone has seen a TV show and commercials. No, we didn't sit and watch a benchmark. But I assumed kids had watched enough TV they would know that you don't just sit and read what you're saying."

Deirdre interrupts, "I really appreciate Cathy doing this because it's really a risk to make our practice public. I think you can at least see what it's like to experience the protocol. What did you find that worked? What did you find that was difficult or a challenge?"

Cathy says, "You know only one of those kids is a native speaker." Deirdre glances at her watch and says, "Two hours is just not enough time. Our time is about up. Let's share what we wrote down." Several volunteers read from their forms. Someone says that the focus was too broad. Deirdre says, "Yes, it was pretty broad. And I don't think 'interesting moments' was really appropriate here. Of course, maybe if we could have seen more, some interesting moments would have popped out...." Shortly after, she announces, "Meeting's almost over. Let's do reflections." She distributes the forms, which teachers fill out quickly and then leave.

Exploration of Vignette Number 1

The meeting agenda delivered mixed messages about the teachers' role in learning communities. Some activities seemed strictly proscribed. Teachers tended to look to their coach for guidance and answers. Some teachers expressed boredom and resistance openly, but Deirdre ignored them. She suggested that the agenda had grown organically out of teachers' interests, referencing their last meeting's reflections, but the reflections themselves revealed only three out of the 21 participants mentioned anything about peer observations. Although Deirdre said she wanted teachers to have serious conversations about practice, she intervened when Cathy invited critical feedback on her teaching. Perhaps, given Cathy's response to colleagues' comments, the decision was a good one. Throughout the meeting, teachers were alternately asked to contribute their thinking and then told what they ought to be doing. At no point did the process actually draw on the teachers' professional expertise or judgment.

An LLC meeting at Lincoln, also three years into the initiative, paints an altogether different picture.

Vignette Number 2

Four teachers sit together around a table in the resource room. They exchange pleasantries and Susan relates an amusing incident with one of her students. Everyone laughs. After a bit more banter, Robin calls the group to order, "Okay, so I'm the focus for our LLC today. I've got an issue. It's important for me to figure

this out. Anyway, I need your help so I brought a consultancy protocol." She goes on,

> I want to try sticking strictly to the protocol so we can make efficient use of time.... Okay, so here's what's going to happen. I'm going to present my problem, which will take about 5 minutes. By the way, Karen, will you please be our timekeeper and facilitate? Thanks. Then you'll have about 5 minutes to ask me some clarifying questions. Next, you'll have 10 to 15 minutes to ask probing questions. Then I'll sort of push back, listen, and take notes while you discuss what you heard and what you think about my issue. That lasts another 10 to 15 minutes. Then FINALLY, I get to talk again [laughter] and I tell you guys what I'm thinking and what I might do next. That will take 5 to 10 minutes. Then the whole group, including me, can talk again for about 10 minutes and we end with a 5-minute debrief. Got it?

Karen takes over, "Robin, go ahead." Robin explains,

> What I'm trying to understand here is what I'm teaching my fifth graders about their responsibilities as learners. I've structured everything closely this year because of the pressure on us to raise scores and make certain that every kid understands what we're doing. But now I notice that unless I've laid out everything step-by-step, they can't do anything on their own.... In my effort to be clear, I've made them direction junkies or something.

The room erupts in laughter.

Robin laughs as well, but quickly adds, "No seriously. I want the kids to have a clear idea of what I expect, but I also want them to have expectations for themselves. Know what I mean?" The other teachers nod vigorously. Robin continues, "I have here a lesson plan for teaching a problem in everyday math.... It involves laying out the problem, giving kids individual work time, and then giving them a protocol so that they can work through the problem together." She passes out the lesson plan. "What I want to know is: Do I have such tight directions in this that the kids

can't really think on their own and do their own problem-solving?"

At this point, Karen says, "Take the rest of the 5 minutes to look this over." Shortly afterward, she invites the group to ask clarifying questions.

"Do you mix groups in terms of ability levels?"

"When they're working alone, can they ask you questions?"

"How many kids to a group?"

"Have they done problems like this before?"

At first questions come rapid fire; then they trail off. Karen announces, "Time for probing questions now."

"Why do the kids work on the same problem both alone and in their groups?"

"Have you thought about their doing one problem alone and then another similar one in the group?"

"I'm interested in this protocol. Did you develop it yourself?"

"How do you ensure all kids participate?"

"Do you explain thinking behind each step in the protocol?"

Robin fields the questions as they pour out of her colleagues. Some answers come quickly for her. Occasionally, though, she makes a comment like, "Whoa! I don't think I considered that!" "That's a great question and, no, I didn't think about that when I was planning this, but next time...." She jots herself a note.

Ten minutes slip away, and Karen moves to the next stage, "Okay, so Robin you need to just listen and take notes now while we discuss...." Robin pushes her chair back from the table. What proves to be a lively discussion is underway, producing comments such as:

"I really like the idea you raised in probing questions, Donna, when you asked if one problem ought to be worked on alone and then another in the group."

"I keep wondering if group work is really the best way to get kids to work through math problems. I know she's got some alone time here, but what do they really get out of group work?"

"Don't forget that she's asked us to consider whether the kids are developing expectations for their own work," Karen reminds the group.

"She wants us to consider whether they're developing a sense of responsibility and ownership as learners."

"Oh yeah, that's right. Well, the protocol's pretty tight, but maybe if she changed the ending a little it could get to what she wants."

"What do you mean?"

I'm thinking that the kids ought to end this group activity by hashing out some guidelines for solving problems like this. Remember that article Alice [the principal] sent us? They could present the guidelines to the rest of the class. Then the next day, groups could try using other groups' guidelines and see if it helps them work on a new problem. It would be sort of a test? I think Robin ought to try this out and tell us what happened.

Robin writes furiously. Her face alternately registers consternation, surprise, frustration, and pleasure. Eventually Robin rejoins the group and blurts out,

Wow! This is the second time I've done a consultancy and it's always an amazing experience. I learn from your questions and I love listening to people talk about my work.... I learned so much, but I especially like the idea of the protocol ending in a session for kids to develop guidelines. That's exactly what I'm going to try. Say, listen, can we quit the protocol now? I really want to talk about this!

Karen begins, "Well, I don't know. We're almost at the end."

"C'mon," Robin pleads. "What do the rest of you think?"

Everyone agrees they want to talk. Karen tosses the protocol over her shoulder, "I guess that goes out the window." People laugh and ideas start flying. Soon, they have created some broad outlines for Robin's experiment. She agrees to ask each group to produce guidelines for problem-solving and promises to keep anecdotal records and to bring them and the students' guidelines for the next meeting, 2 weeks away.

"Thanks, you guys, for everything," Robin says.

"Okay," Karen says, "I think we've got an agenda for next time.... Better get going; the bell rang."

Discussion: Teacher Learning

The contrasts between the first and second vignettes are telling. The first lacked the following qualities quite present in the second:

Rotating facilitation and shared leadership
LLC meetings as an opportunity for teacher learning on teachers' terms
Authentic and enthusiastic participation
Problem-posing to draw on expertise and judgment within the group
Using protocols as tools rather than prescriptions
Keeping the group small (five members compared to twenty-one)
Linking LLC membership and work closely to teachers' everyday work
Raising problems and questions of common interest

Consequently, teachers in the second vignette built knowledge as they questioned their practices. They consulted outside expertise (the article from the principal) but also reflected on what they have learned from experience. They openly aired classroom struggles and asked colleagues for help. There was a clear link to demands of everyday practice, and a common topic for investigation arose from group discussion. By contrast, in the first vignette, it was hit or miss whether the Spanish teacher's question related to the other educators in the room, some of whom could not speak or understand Spanish. There was no reference to outside readings, but a rather inflexible adherence to protocols. In fact, teachers seemed to equate learning with their capacity to follow the protocols and not with their collegial interactions—the very dynamic protocols were meant to structure.

Randolph's LLC stressed compliance with techniques; Lincoln's promoted authentic dia-

logue about real issues of practice. Teachers began to think of themselves as primary agents for necessary changes in teaching and learning. In order for their students to achieve more, they knew they needed to be constantly learning. Together, they shouldered responsibility to systematically inquire into present practices, consult outside expertise, reflect on what they had learned from experience, and engage in searching conversations with one another. In the process, they were building effective pedagogical knowledge that the children they served needed so badly. This is the kind of story we need to see much more of in the nation's schools.

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