

Foreword

Every year, my colleagues who teach educational administration and provide support for practicing leaders peruse the literature seeking appropriate texts for our administrative candidates and leaders. And every year we come up with a group of books, each of which fulfills one facet of the theory and practice issues we would like addressed. Some books are primarily theoretical and frustrate practitioners who need to link theory and practice as they learn and subsequently implement. Others are purely practical and do not provide a conceptual framework for their recipes for administrative success. Many textbooks offer a step-by-step procedural guide for administrators, despite the research evidence that one size does not fit all. Texts that are primarily collections of case studies contain stories and scenarios that may or may not be applicable or useful to the reader, particularly because studies about others do not usually influence the learner's "theory in use," that is, actual practice.

Schools as Professional Learning Communities is the exceptional book that neither limits itself to one theoretical focus nor tries to offer a how-to script. What does it accomplish and how does it reach its goal?

The first chapter introduces a conceptual framework that undergirds the rest of the book. Roberts and Pruitt pull together many of the central concepts and theoretical architects of the learning community and use their ideas to answer key questions about the learning community. The first chapter also sets the format for the rest of the book. The questions posed at the beginning of the chapter frame the discussion. The authors respond with a clear and concise description of the characteristics of the learning community. The subsequent chapters explore the characteristics of the school structures that emanate from this conceptual framework and offer strategies, tips, and processes for their development.

Each chapter focuses on at least one concept of the learning community and then offers multiple strategies and activities upon which the community-building process can be based. Alternative suggestions and a choice of resources to foster development of each learning characteristic allow the designated or potential leader to make adaptations to his or her specific site. Brief supporting case studies and scenarios based on the authors'

extensive professional experiences as leaders and facilitators help authenticate the ideas and clarify the suggested activities. Tips for leaders and sample implementation and feedback forms permit the leader pressed for time to operationalize the strategies quickly. The ongoing references to Web sites and to the related literature expand the reader's options for reflection and implementation. These references make the text more user and reader friendly. And every chapter concludes with suggestions for reflection and practice that can also help get the change process off the ground.

The book's readability is essential for the overburdened leader, teacher-leader, and the prospective administrators who will need to convey the newly learned ideas and strategies to their colleagues and staff. Educational jargon has been by and large eliminated. The few remaining necessary words that underlie concepts are defined and supported by examples. The questions at the beginning of each chapter pique the reader's interest and then serve as a guide through the chapter.

The tone also sustains interest. It is conversational, accessible, friendly, and collegial. One has the feeling that Roberts and Pruitt are in conversation with each other and the readers. The authors' combined knowledge and vast personal experiences with each characteristic of the learning community give life to the examples, scenarios, and suggestions. The tone has another quality: respect for the educator. For example, the inclusion of references to key books and Web sites presumes the professionalism of the reader. The writers expect that the readers will supplement their knowledge and skills as needed through the recommended resources.

This assumption of professionalism forms part of one of the most admirable features of the text: the modeling of the creation of a learning community. First, the book's orientation toward leadership is inclusive. All staff members in a school can readily understand *Schools as Professional Learning Communities* and can choose which concepts or characteristics they would like to encourage at their site, thereby engaging in the establishment of their learning community. The book's readability, fostering of reflection, rich spectrum of approaches for building a learning community, and myriad points of departure for promoting each characteristic exemplify how the readers themselves can proceed. Thus, in the writing of this rich, comprehensive and at the same time accessible book, Roberts and Pruitt themselves set the stage for the creation of communities of learners.

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