

Remarks of Hayes Mizell on December 4, 2006 at the Annual Conference of the National Staff Development Council. The Annual Conference was held at the Opryland Hotel in Nashville, TN. Mizell is the Distinguished Senior Fellow of the National Staff Development Council.
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We “Won”.... Now What?

In 1969, the seeds of what would become the National Staff Development Council were sewn with the meeting of a small group of educators responsible for staff training in their large school districts. It was not until 1976, however, that their loose organization adopted a constitution, and a year later it elected its first president. Finally, in 1980, NSDC incorporated as a legal entity and obtained a charter as a non-profit organization.

The motives of NSDC’s founders have been lost in the mists of history, but the organization’s oral tradition is that they felt there was no place for them and their interests in established national education organizations. Staff development was not recognized as a distinct field, set apart from administration and teaching. Other interests of the founders are less clear. Perhaps they simply believed it would be useful to have a network of educators with similar job responsibilities. Perhaps they were interested in improving what was then called "in-service training." Perhaps they hoped that a national organization would move staff development beyond a mere function to gain the visibility, status, and resources necessary to become a recognized field within the education profession.

Whatever the dreams of NSDC's founders, they could not have imagined what the organization has become. Not only does NSDC currently have a membership of 12,000 and a budget of over six million dollars, but also in recent years "staff development" has morphed into "professional development." Forty states have professional development standards and about 25

of those have either adopted NSDC's standards or have promulgated standards closely related to those of NSDC.

Researchers and educators now agree that professional development is a critical component of raising the performance levels of both teachers and students. National and local education leaders routinely cite high-quality professional development as one of the reasons for increases in student achievement. When a Durango, Colorado, elementary school won a \$10,000 award for its high scores on the state's student assessment program, the superintendent said the school "demonstrates how effective schools can be when they align instruction with state standards, focus on individual achievement, commit to professional development, and involve families and neighbors in their communities." In Sioux City, Iowa, where the school district won a state award for narrowing the achievement gap, an assistant superintendent credited professional development in reading. In Bryan, Texas, a school principal said "fostering confident, well-instructed teachers is the base for student success" and she reported that at her school "teachers are grouped into instructional teams and provided professional development, including mentoring for young teachers."

Education leaders also cite professional development as one remedy for unacceptable levels of student performance. When a Manchester, Connecticut, administrator described how her school system would seek to close the achievement gap between African-American, Hispanic, and white students, she cited "professional development for teachers, attempts to increase parental involvement, and bringing multiculturalism into the classroom." In the state of Washington, a group of superintendents concerned about poor mathematics performance by high school juniors and seniors has proposed a "vigorous, concerted effort to get math teaching aligned with state standards, to provide ongoing professional development so educators can teach

math more effectively, and to identify students who are falling behind and get them the extra help they need to catch up." In Massachusetts, where 48 superintendents are seeking \$25 million in state funds to hire math and science teachers, they have committed to "improving teacher recruitment and preparation; improving professional development; and changing the way teachers are paid." Just last month, the executive director of the National Science Teachers Association, responding to the National Assessment of Educational Progress report of poor student achievement in eighth grade science, said "Teachers need continuous professional development throughout their teaching careers that promotes a variety of pedagogical approaches and enhances their skills in teaching." In Texas and Florida, the RAND Corporation studied 250 schools that had adopted comprehensive reform models and found that teachers received only "about half of the recommended initial training and only one-quarter of the recommended ongoing professional development." RAND concluded that "Without substantially more support, it is not likely most schools will be able to faithfully adopt these models of school improvement."

One might legitimately conclude, therefore, that NSDC has "won." Professional development is a recognized field. Education change agents acknowledge its important place in the pantheon of essential strategies for school reform and raising levels of teacher and student performance. The federal government, states, and school districts are spending more money for professional development than at any time in history. "Professional learning communities" are all the rage, in concept if not in implementation. And within the past five years a completely new category of educators has emerged, professional developers at the school site who partner with and coach classroom teachers in improving their practice.

By any standard, these are major achievements. Whatever the Goals of NSDC's founders, surely they have been met and surpassed. Of course, the organization did not achieve this alone. While NSDC has led the way, thousands of state and local educators have been and continue to be foot soldiers in battles to make professional development more relevant, useful, engaging, and effective. Researchers have indirectly assisted this movement by studying the tangled entrails of school reform and concluding that professional development is a primary organ. In addition, state assessment and accountability laws have revealed the yawning gaps in what students know and can do, thereby generating demands for more highly skilled teachers.

So where is the field of professional development now? Two metaphors come to mind. The first metaphor comes from an event in 1966. The United States was sinking deeper and deeper into the quagmire of the Vietnam War. Both those who supported the war and those who opposed it had plenty of advice for President Lyndon Johnson about what actions he should take. But in a brief speech on October 19, 1966, Senator George Aiken, a Republican from Vermont, proposed that the United States should simply "declare victory and withdraw."

Given the success of professional development, NSDC could choose to "declare victory and withdraw." Of course, that is not a realistic option because during the past 25 years NSDC has gained greater insights about the potential of and challenges to professional learning. When NSDC began, and for many years thereafter, few people expected staff development to impact student learning in the near term. If the issue of student achievement came up at all, the typical response was that educators "hoped" professional development would "ultimately" effect students, but almost no one was confident enough to make a direct link between the learning of educators and the learning of students. This has changed, as the vignettes I shared earlier indicate. NSDC now understands that the expectations for professional learning are much higher

than they were 25 years ago, or even 10 years ago, and that poses both greater demands on and opportunities for the field.

At the same time, there are still thousands of educators whose understanding of professional development is locked in a time warp. These are the great unwashed, those who have either not heard or not understood the message that for public schools to increase the performance levels of all their students, all educators in all schools must experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work. These educators are easy to identify by the concepts they hold and the words they use. They regard professional development as a finite resource, dependent on the few days and dollars that legislatures and school boards dole out, so they talk about “a staff development day” and achieve equally limited results. They think of professional learning as occurring in only one place, so they speak of “the professional development room” and refer to teachers “cycling through the staff development center.” They treat professional development as a commodity, purchasing it from distant vendors or manufacturing it in the central office, then “providing” or “delivering” it for educators’ consumption. They even use staff development as a convenient escape hatch. When inappropriate behavior by an educator surfaces on the front page of the local newspaper, school officials quickly call for “a professional development plan to prevent any future occurrences.” These constructs indicate that NSDC has a lot of work to do. The hearts and minds of many educators are still closed, still at risk. This is no time to declare victory and withdraw.

I mentioned two metaphors. The second is from the 1972 movie, *The Candidate*. You may recall the story line is that a youthful, handsome, and idealistic lawyer, played by Robert Redford, is picked by the Democratic Party in California to run for the United States Senate. However, party professionals and political pundits consider his opponent to be invincible. No

one expects the Redford character to win. During the campaign, he speaks his mind and tweaks the Establishment, but otherwise he is groomed, shaped, and directed by campaign professionals. At the end of the movie, the character played by Redford surprises everyone by winning, but realizes that he has no idea how to actually be a senator. In the famous last line of the movie, he turns to his adviser during the raucous victory celebration and asks, “What do we do now?” Educators who have led professional development to its current level of significance might ask themselves the same question. Fortunately, leaders of the field are not as clueless as the lead character in *The Candidate*, but it is just as important for them to think hard about professional learning’s agenda for the future.

Of course, there is not likely to be a grand convocation of professional development thinkers, practitioners, and researchers to craft an agenda for the future, drawing on many different perspectives and experiences. But let us imagine that NSDC organizes a Wingspread Conference just for this purpose. What would be your recommendations for the future of professional development? What would it look like in your state or school district? How would educators experience it?

Begin by considering how broad or narrow the term “professional development” should be. Virtually every field has activities its practitioners refer to as “professional development.” Lawyers, accountants, health professionals, and even public relations staff participate in learning experiences either because their professions require it or because it is necessary to stay competitive in their field. It is important to be clear about this, because the name “National Staff Development Council” does not refer to a specific profession. Nevertheless, the organization does not aspire to address all possible purposes or types of activity that could be defined by the

generic term “staff development.” Clearly, NSDC is an association of people focused on professional development in the field of education and, for the most part, K-12 public schools.

But NSDC’s focus is even more narrow. It is primarily concerned with developing educators who are currently employed by public school systems, not with developing college and university students who have yet to enter the profession. This distinction is important because many people seem to believe it is appropriate to apply the term “professional development” to both endeavors. Confusion about the term’s meaning and its application is not an asset in efforts to strengthen the professional development of K-12 educators.

However, there is also a problem with the concept of professional development as many policymakers and leaders in K-12 education use it. “Professional development” may describe an information session to brief educators about a new state law or regulation on topics such as reporting suspected child abuse or how to administer a state test. “Professional development” may also include a bureaucratic process such as additional hours of post-secondary education required to maintain certification, or units of training to meet the terms of a union’s contract with a school board. Conceptualizing professional development as a broad umbrella that justifies bringing such an array of activities under it has two possible effects: (1) It dilutes the limited professional development resources available to improve the classroom pedagogy and school leadership of educators; and (2) it compels educators to participate in training activities of dubious quality that detract from the educators’ focus on the academic development of their students. Because many educators react negatively to these experiences, they may come to regard all professional development with suspicion, if not hostility. Therefore, there is a need for the field of K-12 professional development to struggle with what types of experiences, for what purposes, fall appropriately within the term “professional development.” If educators’

professional development includes all adult learning, for all purposes, its impact will always be limited.

Next, consider the issue of values. Professional development must be grounded in a set of values strong enough to counter the adult-centered operational cultures of school systems and schools. It is these pressures that so often produce so much staff development of so little consequence. This is why it is important to speak and act on behalf of the fundamental value that students, not educators, are the primary clients of professional development. Professional development has no reason to exist if it does not help educators develop the attitudes, behaviors, knowledge, and skills necessary for the timely preparation of all students to perform at the proficient level. If all persons responsible for decisions affecting professional development adhere to this value, the learning of educators will be more appropriate and fruitful.

A corresponding value is that professional development must produce substantive, positive learning and doing by both educators and students. Each person who conceives and plans professional development experiences must do so to achieve specific changes in educator and student behavior that are necessary for higher levels of performance. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind about the educator and student outcomes a particular professional development experience should yield. The outcomes should go well beyond the interim step of what educators learned as a consequence of professional development to how successfully they applied what they learned to benefit students. Professional learning that changes educators must also be manifest in educators changing students.

If this is the case, it will be easier to take the next essential step, to assess why and how a professional development experience either produced the desired outcomes or failed to do so. One reason many educators approach staff development experiences with more cynicism than

hope is because they know their school officials will not make the investment necessary to learn if the experiences produced significant results. Consequently, there is no accountability. Not knowing whether professional development makes a difference, and how much of a difference, for whom, is the same as not caring whether it makes a difference. If school system and school leaders do not hold professional development to high standards of performance and results, they compromise its potential from the very beginning.

The final value that must guide the future of professional development is respect. It is no secret that too much staff development is disrespectful of educators' needs, time, experience, and intellect. So long as this continues, professional development will never significantly impact student performance. Many teachers experience more frustration than success in responding to their students' achievement challenges. However, they will never improve unless their minds and hearts are engaged in learning they experience as meaningful and useful. Respecting and drawing upon the assets of these educators, as well as honoring their limitations, is an absolute prerequisite to effective learning experiences.

Also fundamental to the future of professional development is achieving greater clarity about who should "own" it. Currently, professional development seems to be the property of those who appropriate money for it, primarily state legislatures and local school systems, and those who have the authority to spend that money, state and local boards of education, their superintendents and their surrogates. In some states and localities, teacher associations are virtual co-owners of professional development because contracts they negotiate include provisions defining the parameters for teachers' learning. One would like to be able to say that all those who currently own professional development are beneficent and wise, and that there are positive results to prove it. But while there are notable examples of successes in professional

development, there is little evidence that, on the whole, it has sparked a great leap forward in the performance levels of educators and students in the United States. Perhaps this lack of evidence is because there have been few efforts to systematically evaluate and report the impact of professional development on principals' leadership, teachers' instruction, and student achievement. Perhaps a greater problem is that many owners of professional development have demonstrated more interest in its quantitative dimensions, how often and how much, and less interest in its quality or results.

When a person owns something, he assumes it is available for his use. This is also true of the owners of professional development. Many superintendents and central office staff regard professional development as their tool to turn the battleship of teachers' instruction with a single stroke. For example, they may mandate that all elementary teachers participate in learning the techniques of a particular reading program. The techniques may, in fact, be "research based" and even useful. However, implementation of the professional development proceeds as though teachers are empty vessels waiting to be filled rather than knowledgeable educators who bring different levels of instructional experience, expertise, and effectiveness to their learning. In this role, teachers become program implementers rather than education problem solvers. They begin to believe that they are neither responsible for nor capable of discovering what is necessary to provide more effective instruction. They come to regard professional development solely as an activity that others conceive and plan for them. The cumulative effect is to further erode teachers' self-efficacy and commitment to their students' learning.

There is a need for a vigorous debate about who owns professional development, their accountability for effectiveness, and whether new ownership is necessary in light of professional development's poor results in some school districts. It is implicit in NSDC's Goal –

“All teachers in all schools will experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work” – that teachers should assume greater ownership of professional development. In practice, what should this mean? Should a group of teacher leaders at each school have responsibility for encouraging, facilitating, and coordinating their colleagues’ professional learning, and monitoring its results? Should the financing of professional development devolve to the school level, and to what extent should teacher leaders be accountable for the use of these funds and the results that accrue? Should the purpose, application, and results of teachers’ professional learning at the individual, team, and departmental levels be transparent within the school and beyond it? If teachers own their professional learning, what will prevent their neglect and abuse of it that has characterized so much staff development in the past? These are difficult questions the field of professional development should not ignore, particularly in light of NSDC’s “all teachers in all schools” Goal.

We can expect that as professional development continues to evolve, the “how” issue will be paramount. It is now well established that all forms of staff development are not equal. They serve different purposes at different times for different people working in different settings. Thanks largely to language in the No Child Left Behind Act, one form of professional development – “1-day or short-term workshops and conferences” – has fallen into disfavor even if it is far from disappearing. This has occurred because a few prominent school reformers began to say loudly and frequently that short professional development activities are not likely to provide educators with the deep learning they need to improve their practice. Yet, the field of professional development continues to be tolerant, probably too tolerant, of most any type of activity that someone chooses to characterize as staff development. This is in spite of a growing consensus that high-quality professional development involves small groups of educators at a

school site, seeking and learning new knowledge and skills to respond to particular problems of student performance. How they do this may vary, ranging from action research, to study groups, to analyzing student work, to observing the practices of other educators, to consulting with an expert. Many types of experiences are possible, but what is constant is that educators collaborate to learn together, they seek learning for a specific purpose, and they welcome new learning derived from their efforts to apply, refine, and assess what they sought to learn in the beginning. This is the “new” professional development that educators who have tried it find more useful and fulfilling than previous models. However, it will be painfully slow in coming if educators who know and care about this approach to professional learning continue to be shy about speaking out against other approaches that are much less effective.

Of course, the increasing use of online professional development poses new challenges. One vendor markets its online offerings as “interactive, self-paced courses [that] provide flexibility without sacrificing meaningful content ... [including] activities, supplemental reading materials, multimedia clips, and Internet resources.” A state department of education says its online professional development provides “approved recertification courses and contract Non-Degree graduate courses ... [that] may be used for 5 or 10-year Professional Certificate renewal and for upgrading certificate status.” The Public Broadcasting Service describes its TeacherLine as “the premier professional development resource delivering [more than 90] courses online for PreK-12 teachers.” Online learning is indeed an exciting development that provides opportunities for “just in time” learning that enables educators to learn on their own terms at a time and place of their choosing. As Internet technology continues to improve, online courses will probably become even more valuable, routinely providing educators with opportunities to observe and interact with highly successful teachers in schools throughout the United States.

The question professional development cannot yet answer is whether virtual professional development will ultimately eclipse all other forms of professional learning and whether it will accelerate more effective classroom teaching. Perhaps virtual teams of educators will energize professional development in unimaginable ways as teachers learn with and from each other via the Internet. It is just as conceivable that online professional development, like more traditional forms, will primarily benefit motivated and self-directed educators but have little effect on others. There is also a danger that if online professional development becomes primarily identified as a convenient means to earn course credits for recertification, graduate degrees, and salary increments, it will have little impact on the school- and classroom-based performance of administrators and teachers. The central question about all professional learning is why educators engage in it and what they intend to do with it. If they participate to satisfy bureaucratic requirements, enhance their credentials, or increase their incomes, it is likely those will be the primary observable results. Judgments about online professional development should center not on how convenient or fun it is, but the extent to which it results in adult learning that becomes manifest in improved student performance.

One reason online professional development is seductive is that it has potential to circumvent a long-standing barrier to learning: time. Many, probably most, educators cannot conceive of how high-quality professional learning experiences could possibly become part of teachers' "daily work." Indeed, as they look at the landscape of the school day, they see that art, music, physical education and other traditional fixtures of the curriculum have vanished because there is not enough time to include them while, at the same time, including the double doses of language arts and mathematics many educators now regard as essential to have any hope of making adequate yearly progress. Ironically, as academic achievement for all students has

become a higher priority, it has become a lower priority to protect time for other activities that support and enhance academic achievement. This is the environment in which calls for daily professional learning will like fall on puzzled, if not deaf ears.

In any gathering of educators discussing school reform, a principal can bring the discussion to a grinding halt simply by citing the lack of time for educators to engage in the intensive professional development reform requires. There are, of course, some energetic and creative school leaders who develop ways to shatter the time barrier and provide daily opportunities for teachers to learn together. But they are the exceptions. If the field of professional development is confident in its understanding that daily, school-based professional learning experiences are the most effective means to improve teachers' instruction, it has to confront the issue of time. It must engage average, burdened school administrators of limited vision and skill to create time for their faculties' professional learning. Merely providing stories of other principals' successes will not suffice. Principals need hands-on, nuts-and-bolts skill-building experiences led by experienced principals who have confronted and overcome the challenge of limited time.

Related to creating time is how to make the most effective use of the time that becomes available. Quality, efficient implementation of professional learning is a continuing problem. It is a problem that will grow, not diminish, as more time becomes available for more professional development. Nothing will be a greater blow to professional learning than the ineffective use of expanded opportunities for educators to learn together more frequently. It is necessary, therefore, for the field of professional development to learn much more about how to wring the highest learning quotient from available resources. Which professional learning experiences, under which circumstances are most likely to yield the highest quality learning and the most

effective applications of that learning? The field of professional development cannot now answer this question because for most of its relatively short life it has focused on process rather than which processes produce the most beneficial results. Until the field can speak and advocate with authority about the specific professional learning experiences that have the greatest impact on teacher and student performance, it will be slow to gain new converts and disciples.

The field of professional development has come a long way during the past 20 years, but it is still vulnerable. In spite of large scale successes such as the National Writing Project, the Alabama Reading Initiative, and the Local Systemic Initiative of the National Science Foundation, engaging and productive professional learning is not yet a daily experience for most public school teachers. Too many education leaders at all levels are satisfied with professional development that falls far short of the quality learning educators need and deserve. This will not change unless the field of professional development becomes much more aggressive, defining professional learning in new, narrow ways focused on meeting the student learning challenges that educators must overcome. This will require, in turn, a campaign to educate teachers and administrators, as well as policymakers and school system leaders. They must understand what professional learning is and what is not, and they must think, act, and lead differently. Persons in these roles now recognize the value of professional development more than in the past, but they do not always act to ensure its integrity or its effectiveness. That is the central challenge of professional learning's future.

Thank you.