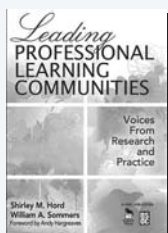


Book Club selection looks at professional learning communities

NSDC members who have added the NSDC Book Club (formerly the Plus Option) to their membership package will receive *Leading Professional Learning Communities: Voices From Research and Practice*, by Shirley M. Hord and William A. Sommers.

The Hord-Sommers book provides an overview illustrating the value and effectiveness of professional learning communities. By using examples from the field, *Leading Professional Learning Communities* demonstrates how PLCs can help educators build leadership capacity; embed professional development; create a positive school culture; develop accountability; and increase student achievement. Through a partnership with Corwin Press, NSDC members can add the Book Club to their



membership at any time and receive four books a year for only \$49 annually. To receive *Leading Professional Learning Communities*, you must

add the NSDC Book Club to your membership before Dec. 31. The book will be mailed to NSDC Book Club members in January.

For more information about this or any membership package, call NSDC at 800-727-7288 or e-mail NSDCoffice@nsdc.org.

on board / SUE McADAMIS

DON'T JUST PARTICIPATE — ENGAGE IN LEARNING

Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, “A man’s mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions.” These words have special meaning for me and, I hope, for NSDC members because they describe what happens when learning occurs for educators.

NSDC’s new statement of purpose — Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves — describes why our organization exists and states the deepest beliefs we hold about our work. The first few words of our purpose statement challenge the current practice of most educators.

What is meant by professional learning? The dictionary says learning is “to gain or acquire knowledge or skill.” Brain researchers tell us that learning occurs when the learner creates new neural networks or strengthens those that already exist. They say this change in structure of the brain causes the learner to practice new habits of mind and behaviors to the point they become habitual.

How does one create new neural networks and/or acquire new knowledge and skills? NSDC’s purpose statement requires all educators to engage, not merely participate, in professional learning. Therein lies a huge difference. To engage in professional learning, educators must experience learning through processes that promote deep meaning, emotion, and/or reflection. These experiences might occur through activities such as reading, writing, observing, listening carefully, or speaking thoughtfully, all of which result in new habits of mind.

I recently observed educators engaging in an effective professional learning at a middle school in my district. The 7th-grade math teachers were implementing a new concept-based curriculum and struggling to make meaning of the new conceptual standards. During their common planning time, the math team worked together to design a unit culminating in a common assessment for all 7th graders. The teachers decided to observe each other teach a lesson from the unit, give feedback to the one teaching, and analyze the lesson together after the observation. The process of lesson study experienced by the 7th-grade math team promoted increased learning for their students as measured by the results of their common assessments. Teachers on the team confessed that as a result of designing the unit and observing and analyzing their peers teach a few lessons, they changed how they eventually taught the lesson. Their brains had changed as a result of being deeply engaged in the learning experience and, as a result, they adapted their teaching methods to be more effective for the students.

This example illustrates how educators can engage with the content of their subject in a way that affects how they think and perform on the job each day. No matter what the setting, whether a grade-level team meeting, professional learning community, whole-faculty study group, workshop, training session, or conference, only high-quality learning experiences will enable educators to reach their full potential to increase student achievement. ■



Sue McAdamis is president of the National Staff Development Council.

