A Learning System

This past week I was involved in a few central office interviews and writing proposals concerning future trainings and consultations I might be providing. In each case the topic of educators learning and creating a culture of adult learning emerged. As most often happens, connected writing by others appeared.

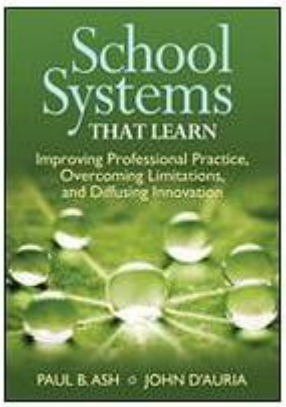
Peter Senge defined learning organizations as:

…organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together.

Paul Ash, in a blog for Learningforward , It's Time to Create School Systems that Learn, (April 22,2013) wrote:

But the capacity of a school district to provide all students with a gold-standard education is directly proportional to the system's ability to function as a learning unit – one that overcomes the limitations of the past and unleashes the collective power of educators to innovate and more effectively reach all students.

Ash along with John D'Auria has authored, School Systems that Learn: Improving Professional Practice, Overcoming Limitations, and Diffusing Innovation.



Ash suggests these roles for educators:

- Teachers see their roles not as conveyors of information but as architects of learning experiences for their students.
- Principals see themselves not as building managers but as leaders who shape and influence learning cultures for teachers.
- Central office leaders see their most significant work as supporting and inspiring the learning and efforts of principals.

Ash summarizes the challenge:

"One of the most vital components of a learning school system is the ability of its leaders to develop learning climates that foster continual experimentation with new strategies and ideas to improve student learning. While there are many factors that contribute to effective schools, creating a school system that learns is the most effective way to improve student learning."

Senge identifies the difficulty, *"While all people have the capacity to learn, the structures in which they have to function are often not conducive to reflection and engagement.* "Linda Darling-Hammond writing in a Washington Post blog, reports these survey findings from teachers that illustrate how much many systems need to change:

Only 32% have a chance to frequently co-create or reflect with colleagues about how a lesson has worked.

Only 21% are given time to frequently examine student work with colleagues.

Only 14% frequently receive feedback from colleagues.

And only 10% frequently have the opportunity to observe the teaching practice of a colleague.

Even worse, evidence suggests that time afforded to educators

to collaborate and problem-solve is eroding quickly. As recently as 2009, a MetLife study indicated that 68% of educators had more than an hour per week to engage in structured collaboration with colleagues to improve student learning. By 2012, only 48% had an hour or more per week for this essential work. In what professional field can practice improve if most practitioners don't have even an hour a week to work together collaboratively?

A great example of experimenting to find time for adult learning was posted on ASCD Edge by Eric Sheninger from New Milford High School in NJ. He cut all non-instructional duties in half to create a Professional Growth Period for teachers. After a year of experience Sheninger has modified the plan to increase teacher autonomy in selecting how to invest their collaborative and learning time.

Our students need all of us in schools to be lead learners modeling skills and attitudes that will empower them for their future.