

Foreword

How do leaders learn? Our profession has thought deeply about teacher learning. Beyond preparation, we support new teachers, pursue reflective practice, engage in instructional supervision and coaching, and design professional development. Indeed, thinking about teacher learning is one of our major preoccupations. This is as it should be.

However, we have not given the same attention to a formal leader's learning. Beyond preparation, the professional development of administrators is haphazard, scant, random, and dependent on the flourishing of such endeavors as leadership academies or institutes. Learning that is systematically embedded in practice is elusive for most formal leaders. Those who are naturally thoughtful carve out their own learning plans and strategies; those who are less thoughtful or view leadership as reactionary rarely engage in systematic learning.

Is there something about the nature of leadership or of the job itself that warrants such neglect? Have leaders already learned what there is to learn? Hardly. In this book, Mary E. Dietz offers us a synthesis of current notions of leadership that helps us to understand that this work requires wisdom, compelling ideas, explicit values and vision, and the shared construction of meaning. Leading is moral work involving "the willingness to be accountable for the well-being of the larger organization by operating in service of those around us" (Block, 1993). Intriguingly, Dietz translates this transformative work into standards that draw out the skills and understandings of leadership. This discussion sets the stage for the real work to come.

In *Designing the School Leader's Portfolio*, Dietz has created a process and a framework that significantly improve the chances that administrators will learn within the context of leading. Such learning requires that district, school, and personal/professional goals and aims converge. Further, alignment among processes for assessing children, teachers, and administrators comes together for the first time. This convergence, or intersection, enables leaders to make sense of their work and find authenticity in shared purpose. This participatory process is a vehicle for the systemic design of an engaging, portfolio development journey—for portfolio is a verb more than it is a noun.

Four phases of the portfolio design frame, a comprehensive learning process, are

- purpose, creating clarity about philosophy and leadership;
- focus, zeroing in on goals and a banner question;
- process, creating plans, gathering artifacts and evidence, participating in professional development activities and roundtable discussions;
- outcomes, assessing and articulating what is learned.

The banner question is a particularly noteworthy concept. This essential or focusing question frames the context for learning. Such a question provides an entry point into the inquiry process, often bubbling into other questions that lead to surprises and new understandings. Collaboration is thoughtful work with portfolio partners (peer coaches) and teams in a roundtable format.

If the portfolio process were presented as a singular journey, it would not be in step with current and persistent thinking that leadership is a shared endeavor. Because of the highly participatory nature of this process, it tends to build learning communities of educational leaders. Leaders experience themselves as learners, collaborators, and facilitators of community learning. This learning container ensures that the best that we know about professional learning takes place: reflection, inquiry, dialogue, and action.

This book is replete with examples, graphics, tools, logs, registries, and questions that bring the text to life. It is highly useable. This book can guide those who have responsibility for the preparation and professional development of school leaders. It can stand on its own.

Dietz has created

- a pioneering effort in the field of leading and learning,
- a comprehensive system that incorporates state of the art assessment endeavors, and
- a learning process.

Congratulations are in order for work well done and skillfully applied in the field through her experiences in districts large and small, urban and suburban.

All leaders learn (just like children). As Dietz points out, "The portfolio provides an envelope for the mind that gives both framework and process to the learner." This work builds a rapprochement between leader and learner that takes us beyond our current experience.

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