

Chapter 20

The Importance of Professional Learning Organizations: Influence on Novice Educators

Thea Yurkewecz-Stellato

State University of New York at Geneseo, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the multiple complexities that many novice educators face as they navigate teaching in a K-12 setting and pursuing higher education degrees. Specifically, the exploration and involvement in professional learning organizations. The goal of this personal reflection is intended to remind readers how critical it is that we mentor and encourage the teacher leaders of tomorrow early in their careers. Research in the field of education highlights the importance of professional learning and leadership and the involvement of educators in professional organizations and committees. Many classroom teachers become involved in extended networks beyond their school communities and take on leadership positions and responsibilities. This chapter contributes to the need for research to examine the design, involvement, and effectiveness of professional learning organizations to support and retain teachers.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the multiple complexities that many young scholars face as they navigate teaching in a K-12 setting and pursuing a PhD. Specifically, I share my personal experience as a First-Generation College Student and the communities of practice that supported my journey from a literacy specialist to a teacher educator. This personal reflection aims to remind readers how involvement in professional learning organizations can influence their career pathways.

National and state literacy organizations provide a platform for educators to communicate, share, and build professional partnerships around literacy practices and research. The work within these organizations can lead to change in the field through advocacy and response to policy. Many of these professional organizations encourage the participation of teacher candidates and novice educators. However, the individual pathways that connect members to these organizations all differ. Research in the field

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-3460-4.ch020

of education highlights the importance of professional learning and leadership and the involvement of educators in professional organizations and committees (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007; ILA, 2018). Many classroom teachers become active in extended networks beyond their school communities and take on leadership positions and responsibilities. My experience shared in this chapter identifies how professional organizations can influence educators' transitions from K-12 classrooms to higher education.

FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT

As a First-Generation College Student, I did not have my family's experiences to help guide my education choices after high school. My father was a second-generation dairy farmer, and my mother worked for the state offices. My communities of practices in the field of education were limited, and as a result, I chose to attend a traditional two-year state college approximately 30 minutes away from home. For the first time, I took courses focused on early childhood education. I built relationships with my peers in my shared coursework and practicum experiences. I was not aware of any professional teaching organization outside of the context of this college community. At the start of my first semester, every student attended one meeting at an informal student club just for first-year education majors. At this point in my career, I did not understand the importance of joining professional learning networks. My attendance at this one meeting connected me with like-minded individuals who promoted further engagement in teaching and learning.

My participation in this club provided opportunities to organize events that build partnerships with local schools. For example, I helped design a literacy night at the college where families from local schools can hear teacher candidates read or engage in literacy activities. We also invited guest speakers from local schools such as administrators or specialized literacy professionals to share information about the profession. It was my first true understanding of the term *professional development*. I also started to learn more about the work as an advocate of change within my community. Through this participation in the organization, I learned how to reach out and recommend educational resources and support to local families. As a sophomore, I continued my involvement with the club and practiced leadership skills to mentor incoming first-year students to this informal group. This experience provided me with the confidence I needed to transfer to a larger four-year college.

TRANSFER STUDENT

I completed my associate degree in early childhood from this two-year state college. My active involvement in this group guided my choice of where I would continue my higher education. As a result, I transferred out of state to a four-year liberal arts college I needed to adapt to new teaching practices and philosophies in education quickly. Not only did my location change, but it also ended my involvement in the communities of practices at my former institution. During this time, technology was not advanced enough to maintain connections through a social media presence. Now a transfer student, I immediately knew that I needed to get involved in an education community at my new campus. Unfortunately, I faced the challenge of entering an established club for education majors. I was not joining this club as a freshman this time, and I felt like an outsider.

7 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-importance-of-professional-learning-organizations/301955

Related Content

Mathematics Teachers' Perceptions of Effective Instructional Practices and Engaging the iGeneration

Elizabeth Yvonne McInnis, Linda F. Cornelious, Jessica L. Murphy, Debra Prince and Wei-Chieh Wayne Yu (2021). *International Journal of Teacher Education and Professional Development* (pp. 1-18).

www.irma-international.org/article/mathematics-teachers-perceptions-of-effective-instructional-practices-and-engaging-the-igeneration/281115

Perceived Effectiveness of Teacher Education Programs on the Professional Competencies of Beginning Teachers

Jungmei Su (2023). *International Journal of Teacher Education and Professional Development* (pp. 1-14).

www.irma-international.org/article/perceived-effectiveness-of-teacher-education-programs-on-the-professional-competencies-of-beginning-teachers/326761

Generative AI in Chinese Early Childhood Education: Teachers' Usage Patterns, Perceptions, and Factors Influencing Pedagogical Applications

Mengze Sun, Rong Yan and Run Wen (2025). *International Journal of Teacher Education and Professional Development* (pp. 1-23).

www.irma-international.org/article/generative-ai-in-chinese-early-childhood-education/382379

Preparing Culturally Competent Teachers Through Faculty-Led Study Abroad

R. McKenna Brown and Stephanie Erin Tignor (2019). *Pre-Service and In-Service Teacher Education: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 72-88).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/preparing-culturally-competent-teachers-through-faculty-led-study-abroad/215559

Healthcare Education: Integrating Simulation Technologies

Eva M. Frank (2019). *Pre-Service and In-Service Teacher Education: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 1045-1064).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/healthcare-education/215606