



‘Outsiders’ become key players in making learning sustained and job-embedded

As professional learning has transformed from one-shot and short-term trainings into job-embedded, team-based, and results-driven professional development, so, too, has the perception of the external partner changed from the old-school image of an outside consultant flying in to tell a group of educators

what it needs to do.

Once team members have examined appropriate student data

to determine their learning needs as educators, they may find that the knowledge they require isn't readily available in their team, school, or district. Partners often have the expertise that a school or team needs as it works through a continuous improvement process. Our definition of effective professional development includes a section on such partners — see Stephanie Hirsh's column on p. 68 to read more about that.

This issue focuses specifically on external partners — partnerships with consultants and technical assistance

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providers, universities, foundations, and so on. But the word “external” evokes a different connotation than what we've discovered about effective partnerships. Someone who is external is an outsider; there's a distance implied.

Ultimately, effective partnerships are about relationships and collaboration. Many of the valuable external partners we encounter are not outsiders — they're team members. They are members of a learning community at a different level, just as the teacher next door is a partner, a principal is a partner, and the subject-matter team is a roomful of partners. The challenge with partners is the same as the challenge with any team member or learning community: What are the best strategies for managing these collaborative relationships so that each team member can contribute and learn appropriately? How does the team agree on and achieve its goals, tasks, and desired outcomes?

That's why articles in this issue stress the importance of clarity about the roles and responsibilities of partners. As Joellen Killion outlines the questions to ask in setting up productive partnerships, she zeroes in on responsibilities and intentions (p. 10). When Julie Horwitz, Janice Bradley, and Linda Hoy examined their challenges as university faculty members coaching math learning communities, they realized they didn't start out by establishing the kind of role

they would play (p. 30).

Shared goals are equally important. While each participant in a partnership enters with a specific set of needs, the relationships flourish when all team members work toward common outcomes. Andrew Lachman and Steven Wlodarczyk learned that, as consultants, they don't benefit from relationships if the districts they work with don't share their values about teaching and learning (p. 16). The fellowship program that Krista Dunbar and Robert Monson write about requires that the central piece of learning work for principal fellows is to address their self-defined school-based challenge (p. 40). The most valuable “outsiders” become key players in making learning sustained and job-embedded — in other words, truly internal.

In this issue, we owe thanks to our partner, The Wallace Foundation. Read the foundation-sponsored piece, “Collaboration paints a bright future for arts education” (p. 44), showcasing what the foundation has learned through its commitment to research in arts education. We also welcome the voice of Learning Forward board president Mark Diaz (p. 63). When the board president shares his perspective in each issue, he writes from his perspective as a member, as a representative of your needs and your world. He joins me in welcoming your input anytime. ■