



With the growth of teacher leadership, the word 'expert' sheds its negative image

I've noticed that the word "expert" has a bad connotation in our field sometimes. When we talk about professional learning, expert can imply someone from outside a school swooping in to offer, for a fee, his or her wisdom from on high. In the most exaggerated versions of this image, the expert doesn't adapt messages to fit particular contexts or consider other

points of view. While this is certainly a caricature, there's a reason we often hear the word so-called in front of the word expert: "We had a so-called expert here last week telling us what we're doing wrong."

Fortunately, as we shift our understanding of what makes a real

difference for schools, we can reclaim the word "expert" as a useful one. When we talk about the experts we know personally and professionally, we use the word with respect. When policy documents outline career continuums, expert (or master) teachers typically have demonstrated their knowledge and skills over the course of many years in leading successful classrooms and supporting colleagues.

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The idea of tapping the expertise that resides in schools underlies so much of what Learning Forward knows about effective professional learning. The school-based cycle of continuous improvement, central to our definition of professional learning, relies not only on data about student and adult needs but also on a culture of shared expertise, where teams of teachers openly examine the practices that work to improve student learning. Expertise from within and beyond the school ensures that collaborative professional learning creates change and sustains growth over time. That so-called expert who flew in may indeed have a lot to offer the school — if the school knows how to ask for the right kind of help and follow up over time to integrate the new knowledge into practice.

The teacher leader is at the heart of bringing expertise to the classroom and the school. Teacher leaders, in the varied recognized and informal roles they play in schools and school systems, ensure that we tap the considerable expertise resident in buildings. The strategies teacher leaders use to spread expertise from room to room include:

- Deliberately developing their expertise over time;
- Openly sharing what they know with other teachers informally and in structured learning experiences;
- Examining student work and discussing the teaching and learning involved;
- Contributing to a culture of trust,

respect, and candor;

- Offering and seeking out valuable resources;
- Demonstrating lessons and strategies in team meetings and in classrooms;
- Letting others know when they need help and being open to others' ideas;
- Seeking support from principals and central office administrators; and
- Stepping in to support colleagues when they see they are struggling.

There are many other ways that the real experts in schools share what they know for the benefit of students and teachers alike. And as the authors in this issue of *JSD* demonstrate, the body of expertise about the concept of teacher leadership is growing significantly. Educators now know more about what it means to be a teacher leader, and more importantly, about the kinds of learning and support that develop skillful teacher leaders. Thanks to the work of the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, there are now model standards that explicate the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and behaviors of teacher leaders. See p. 16 for excerpts from these recently released standards (with gratitude to ETS for permission).

Who is the expert you turn to? How are you ensuring others have access to expertise? We'd like to hear your story any time. ■