



## Why collaboration matters

There's no question that Learning Forward values collaboration and community as critical elements of effective professional learning. It's not just by chance that Learning Communities is the first of the Standards for Professional Learning. Learning collaboratively and collective responsibility contribute to more successful learning for students.

I can point to three readings that will help leaders deepen their understanding of why collaboration in schools is so important, why it is central to our definition of professional learning and why it must be embedded in the vision and values of a comprehensive professional learning system.

First is an article called "Deep smarts" by Dorothy Leonard and Walter Swap (2004). Deep smarts, according to the authors, is the valuable know-how that employees build over time in an organization. More than specific skills, more than knowledge, deep smarts is developed through years of experience and becomes part of the unconscious way an employee works.

The challenge for leaders is explicitly recognizing the value of deep smarts and finding ways to nurture its growth. And, most importantly, to retain it when someone leaves. Think about when a master teacher retires or moves on and the sheer volume

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of wisdom leaves your school. How can you tap into those deep smarts to spread wisdom to every teacher?

Second is "The missing link in school reform" by Carrie Leana. Through her research in New York City Schools, Leana and her fellow researchers verified the importance of peers learning together in schools. She calls the knowledge educators create together social capital. Her research shows that social capital outweighs human capital — that is, knowledge created collectively has more impact than the knowledge a single educator holds.

With these as recent touchstone pieces, I had a real aha moment when I read the book *Professional Capital* by Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan. Professional capital encompasses human capital, social capital, and decisional capital. Decisional capital is the wisdom built over years of experience to guide professional judgment and decision making.

When Hargreaves and Fullan explain their concept, they reference Leana on the importance of collaborative learning. And as I read their definition of decisional capital, I made a connection to the notion of deep smarts. The interplay of these concepts is what leads to professional capital.

Coming to understand this idea cemented for me precisely why collective learning and collective responsibility are core to what we envision for professional learning: When educators work together deeply,



with trust, over time, with sufficient resources and guided by data about what students need most, they can adapt their skills, change their practices, and create ever-improving learning experiences so that every student learns at high levels.

What steps can you take to put collaborative learning at the heart of your learning system? What else do you need to learn? How can you help others to share this understanding? Do some reading this summer and get inspired.

### REFERENCES

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