



## Fundamentals make a difference at every skill level

If I were to map my trajectory as a cook, plotting the growth of my ability to put a decent meal together, the line would be all over the place.

I didn't plan to learn a few fundamental dishes first and then build expertise in a logical fashion. When I read stories about the development of skilled cooks, I wonder why I didn't master the poached egg years ago.

Looking back, I realize that the people I was with and the context of my life gave me opportunities to try different things at different times, learning as I went. And now, after years of cooking, I have enough accumulated knowledge to put together a variety of dishes without intensive study or preparation.

When I stumble mid-recipe, my reaction is different than it was years ago. Then, I would have barreled ahead in confusion, following along as best I could, and sometimes chance upon a decent outcome (and sometimes not). Now, I use my foundational knowledge about how ingredients, heat, and time come together to decide a next step.

As with my development as a cook, those who come to professional learning leadership often don't find themselves following a logical road map to become skilled in their craft.

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Thanks to opportunity, they may need to develop a particular set of skills early on. Eventually, their knowledge and skills deepen, and they have expertise to draw on in many situations.

Yet no matter how skilled and experienced learning leaders are, consider why it's important to keep turning to the fundamentals:

1. **With experience, we see fundamental information through entirely new lenses.** It is one thing to study the Concerns-Based Adoption Model as you think about addressing the challenge of change. It's quite another when you have worked with real people who exemplify the various concepts you've studied. Returning to that foundational knowledge with such experience allows you to understand it more deeply and apply it again in new ways.
2. **Sometimes we need reminders about what is foundational.** When

we have opportunities to develop certain expertise, our focus can become more precise and narrow as we go deeper. Yet even those who know every detail about the creation and implementation of microcredentials, for example, will still need general knowledge about adult learning for their work to be effective.

3. **The longer we work as knowledgeable experts in a field, the more we will encounter upcoming learning leaders.** As educators, we have a responsibility to help professional learning novices develop a solid, well-rounded base on which to build for the future.
4. **We may find ourselves in the position of the equivalent of not knowing how to poach an egg.** For example, maybe a central office leader is an experienced literacy coach and instructional leader yet never facilitated a group of peers. That leader may need to learn some basics about agenda, norm setting, and group decision making. While we don't cover all the basics in this issue of *JSD*, we do highlight concepts that have been bedrock learning for several educators. As Learning Forward members, you have access to years of such resources, including those that explore the Standards for Professional Learning, the most foundational of all professional learning essentials. ■