

Considerations in Working with Outside Specialists to Support Lesson Study

Lesson Study can be greatly enhanced by collaborating with an outside specialist—such as a teacher or researcher who is highly knowledgeable about the subject matter under study and its teaching-learning. It is most effective to involve an outside specialist early on, so that the specialist has a chance to contribute ideas about the direction of the work, to suggest curricular resources, and/or to schedule time to serve as a commentator on the research lesson.

An outside specialist can greatly ease teachers’ work in locating useful materials within the huge variety of purportedly useful internet and print resources. However, keep in mind that a subject matter specialist who routinely meets with the group—particularly one who quickly jumps in to help, and who team members look to as an authority—can also keep teachers from doing certain kinds of learning.

If you choose to use an outside specialist, make sure he or she understands the teacher-led, collaborative, student-focused nature of Lesson Study. Sharing the following table may help the specialist understand the differences between Lesson Study and traditional expert-led professional development.

TRADITIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	LESSON STUDY
Begins with answer	Begins with question
Driven by outside “expert”	Driven by participants
Communication flow: trainer -> teachers	Communication flow: among teachers
Hierarchical relations between trainer and learners	Reciprocal relations among learners
Research informs practice	Practice is research
By Lynn Liptak, Paterson School # 2, New Jersey	

Additional resources in Courses support specialists to serve as final commentators. If you plan to have a subject-matter specialist meet routinely with your team, we recommend you choose a different specialist to serve as final commentator, since a primary function of that role is to bring “outside” eyes to the team’s research lesson.