

The Many Faces of Teacher Leadership

Over the 27 years that I worked for the School District of Philadelphia, I played a variety of roles: classroom teacher (and all the roles that connotes), professional development provider, school reform facilitator, teacher-consultant with the [National Writing Project](#), curriculum designer, small learning community member with colleagues, department coordinator, union activist, and teacher-researcher. With the exception of a few years spent out of the classroom to work with other teachers, I played all of these roles “from” the classroom, continuing to teach students every day, sometimes with a release period but often without. Some of these could be considered formal roles in that I was appointed by a school administrator or the district, but most of them reflected the choices that I made as a classroom teacher who also wanted to have an impact beyond the classroom. As I became more aware of the ways that my classroom was nested in a wider context of the school and district and realized that I could improve my classroom teaching and the school by working with colleagues, my understanding of the role of teacher as teacher-leader expanded.

In recent years, several new organizations with a focus on teacher leadership have been established (e.g., [Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession](#), [Center for Teaching Quality](#), and [Teach Plus](#)). But the idea of teacher leadership is not necessarily new; similar to other educational ideas, the emphasis placed on teacher leadership ebbs and flows. It sometimes seems ironic, at the moment, to talk about teacher leadership, in large part because of current discourses that exclusively blame teachers for lack of student achievement, challenge the professionalism of teachers, and sometimes celebrate “short term teaching” instead of [teaching as a career](#).

Nevertheless, teachers who participate in the Knowles Science Teaching Foundation (KSTF) Teaching Fellowship Program—some are in the early years of their careers and others have a decade or more of experience—are taking formal and informal leadership roles across the country.

At KSTF, I have seen the many ways that our Fellows (Teaching Fellows and Senior Fellows who have finished the five year Fellowship) are both teachers and leaders. While the actual form of teacher leadership differs across diverse schools and contexts, our Fellows have an ever-increasing impact on their schools, districts and beyond.

Below are some examples of teacher leadership exhibited by KSTF Fellows. These are just a few of the many faces of teacher leadership:

Teacher leaders build networks of teachers who can collaborate on improving curriculum and instruction

Fellows and other teachers in four different schools who are teaching International Baccalaureate (IB) physics I and II are designing curriculum and units together and meeting every week. They are sharing and teaching their lessons, using each other's assessments, and reflecting on the process and examining student work.

A group of early career biology Fellows are working together to design their own professional learning around the [5 Practices framework](#), establishing a group across the country that studies and learns together to improve their teaching practices.

Teacher leaders have an impact on teaching, learning, and collaboration in their schools

Two science teachers, one Senior Fellow and her colleague, in Colorado are working with their science department to develop a new approach to freshman physics and other science courses, incorporating [the Patterns Approach](#). Teachers of science, math and other disciplines are visiting their classrooms and using online resources to implement the units and learn about ways to build collaborative approaches among students.

In several schools, Fellows established "observation clubs" made up of teacher volunteers across multiple departments. The teachers in these clubs visit each other's classrooms and examine what "student engagement" means in different classrooms.

Fellows in schools across the country are leading professional learning communities (PLCs) within departments and schools. For example, in one school, math teachers in grades 7-12 are meeting regularly to develop more continuity across their math curriculum.

Teacher leaders take a stand on a range of issues and ideas and share with the wider public

Fellows are submitting manuscripts and publishing in peer reviewed journals, including [The Science Teacher](#).

Fellows are blogging about their teaching (e.g., [Reflections on Education, Teaching, and Learning](#); [Sustainability and Salad Greens: A Greenhouse Success Story](#); and [Incorporating Arduino in Math Class](#))

Fellows are taking stands on educational issues and addressing policy

makers and the public, such as writing about **what prepared me as a first year teacher**, sending an **open letter to Pennsylvania's Governor**, and participating in Education Nation.

Teacher leaders mentor and provide professional learning opportunities for other teachers

Fellows are coaching and mentoring other teachers, as classroom mentors for student teachers, coaches for new teachers, and district specialists in their content areas.

Fellows are providing professional development in their schools and districts, designing experiences for other teachers that incorporate active participation. They are also presenting at national meetings of the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA), the American Association of Physics Teachers (AAPT), the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), the National Association of Biology Teachers (NABT), and the Penn Ethnography Forum.

Teacher leaders establish themselves as leaders in their district and state
A Senior Fellow has collaborated with her district to design and teach in a new, experimental high school in the district focused on project based learning.

Some Fellows are active participants and leaders in local and regional professional organizations. For example, a Senior Fellow was elected president of his state Science Teachers Association, and another Senior Fellow is the incoming president of his union local.