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Professional Development For Technology

EDITOR'S NOTE

Professional development for the K12 landscape has taken on a new perspective. This Spotlight will help you evaluate your PD priorities and approaches; glean insights on how other education leaders are supporting their colleagues; dig into who reports they need or want a mentor; break-down how to build a professional learning community in your schools; and learn how to involve students in your PD programs.

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How to Fix 7 Fatal Flaws in Tech Professional Development

By Alyson Klein

Professional development to help educators use technology for teaching and learning has been critical for decades, but also riddled with pitfalls.

During the 2020-21 school year, those flaws became more evident than ever, educators say, even as the training itself became more important. Teachers had to navigate learning environments that were brand new to almost everyone, including virtual and hybrid learning. And professional development had to shift on the fly, in the middle of a crisis that touched every aspect of teaching and learning.

“All the evidence over the years has been that most professional development isn’t doing the job,” said Keith Krueger, the executive director of the Consortium for School Networking. “It’s not just-in-time. It’s not personalized. The priority is decided by the department head or the principal as opposed to what the teacher needs.

“I don’t think this is necessarily something particularly new, but in the pandemic it became so obvious as overnight every teacher had to [learn] remote learning. I think [districts] saw the failure of the traditional ways of doing professional development.”

One silver lining of the pandemic is that it forced some districts to rethink their PD priorities and strategies and find new ways of training teachers. Teachers’ tech skills have dramatically improved, and some district leaders say they don’t want to go back to the old ways of delivering PD.

Here’s a look at some of the biggest perennial problems or mistakes in tech-related professional development, and how some districts are using their pandemic experience to address them.

Emphasizing broad more than than deep learning

The problem: Teachers are presented with so many new technological tools that they hardly have enough time to figure out which ones are actually going to complement their teaching style and subject matter, said Adam Gebhardt, an art teacher and technology mentor at Jefferson Hills Intermediate School, near Pittsburgh. “It’s like the Cheesecake Factory menu,” Gebhardt said, referring to the upscale chain restaurant with a famous-



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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CONSORTIUM
FOR SCHOOL NETWORKING

ly wide variety of choices. “There are so many options, and it’s overwhelming.”

How to address it: Let teachers go deeper, not broader. “The vast number of options is almost counterproductive,” Gebhardt said. “We almost need fewer choices, the best, most-effective ones.” Teachers should be given space to experiment with a particular tool, and allow their students to explore it too. “For me, I don’t need training, I need time,” Gebhardt said. When he introduces a new application to his students, he will let them play with it for 10 minutes or so. By then, many will have found features and have specific questions, so that the class can learn together.

Not providing ongoing support

The problem: Teachers are given a one-shot professional development session on a new tool or strategy and then they are left to puzzle through it themselves.

How to address it: Teachers need to know who they can follow-up with to get additional support, educators said. Whenever the district runs a training, it should “have a person behind the learning [who can] provide that ongoing support, even if it’s not in a formal capacity,” said Micah Brown, a technology and innovation lead teacher for Kansas’ Andover school district. For instance, Brown has given trainings on Seesaw, an interactive student engagement tool, and then gotten questions from teachers on how to implement it, even as much as a year later.

Not making the training practical and customized to what and how teachers teach

The problem: Teachers have vastly different needs when it comes to technology, depending on what they teach and how advanced their technological skills are, said Jessica Sanders, an instructional coach at Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School in Rio Rancho, N.M. Districts need to “make it relevant, make it current, use research to back what we are conveying to teachers, otherwise you sit in a room full of blank [faces].”

How to address it: The Andover school district came up with a partial solution inspired by subscription services, such as Stitch-Fix, which sends customers a box of clothing or other goods tailored to their personal taste and needs. In Andover, teachers took a survey, telling the district’s digital professional development team what they were interested in learning, what they teach, and how they absorb material best. And then the district sent them a box of materials customized to their needs, role in the school, and learning style. They directed auditory learners to podcasts, for instance, and visual learners to blogposts. Teachers then had six weeks to go through the materials in the box at their own pace and in their own time. “A lot of our feedback was just how nice it was that everything in the box pertained to them and their subject and their content area,” said Rachel Meenen, a technology and innovation lead teacher.

Not evaluating the impact

The problem: It is hard to tell whether a particular training or course had any real effect on



Online PD Brings Professional Learning into the 21st Century

There was very little that was left unaffected when schools moved to remote and hybrid education. After “going digital” in a big way, many districts are reluctant to let go of the technology, skills, and agile differentiation that was the product of adopting remote and hybrid learning. Technology is becoming more profoundly intertwined with our lives, and many educators are looking for ways to sustainably improve ed-tech skills. Online PD has emerged as an important tool to address the challenges and demands of this ever-evolving educational landscape.

With that in mind, how can school leaders integrate online PD into their culture quickly and effectively? Specifically, PD that leverages technology in a meaningful way, as one survey showed that less than half of teachers felt that the PD they received supported their use of edtech effectively. We’ve worked with schools for many years to integrate online PD into their overall PD plans. Here are three ways to encourage a positive culture of professional development that is targeted, meaningful, and accessible.

1 Community decision making and communication

Pedagogy and technology are constantly evolving, so making sure you are communicating with your team on what PD would be most valuable to them is not just a good idea, it’s essential. Collective decision-making increases PD efficacy because teachers will select PD they find useful to their teaching practice. In other words, if teachers have a say in how they are receiving PD, it is much more likely that they will use it and benefit from it.

It’s also essential to identify PD content that aligns with the initiatives in your school. Access to technology like 3D printers, robotics kits, or other digital tools can also be communicated, along with the PD resources needed to get educators up and running with any new technology. With OTIS for educators, you are paired with a PD Specialist who will conduct a needs assessment in order to identify instructional goals, inventory your current technology, discuss your initiatives, and curate PD content that aligns with your objectives. Instruction is modeled in PD sessions that are broadcast live, then archived into a library for future viewing.

Make time for onboarding teachers so they understand what you are providing and what they have access to. Do not fall into the trap of purchasing a PD program and not creating awareness within your

school. Communicating that there is online PD available through emails and social media is an important step in launching a program. Walk the teachers through what is available to them in an onsite session, then leave them with printed materials on how to access their accounts and who the online PD administrators are at their school. This provides them with everything they need to feel comfortable accessing the PD online for the first time. It’s also a great opportunity to ask questions and make sure everyone can log into their accounts without any trouble.

2 Balance structure and flexibility

As stated in the Glimpse K12 analysis of school spending, “administrators must ask themselves, ‘Are we prepared to set clear expectations for usage and implementation fidelity?’” Setting clear guidelines and expectations for usage helps clarify goals and desired outcomes and gives teachers the support they need. For example, to prepare teachers for distance learning using G-Suite and Google Classroom, our PD Specialists select the appropriate content, then organize it into a “playlist” to be distributed to



teachers. This keeps the PD focused on the outcomes you are looking for, and your teachers receive PD relevant to their needs.

It is also important to make sure online PD is accessible and practical for all educators. Combining online PD options with collaborative discussions is a fantastic way to do this. With live broadcasts, OTIS for educators simulates an in-person PD experience. It also has a unique option for group viewing, which allows a team of teachers to watch an online PD session together, yet each person will get individual credit for taking the PD. Knowing that they can participate in a session together and support each other makes online PD adoption easier for your teachers. In addition, these live sessions offer participants the chance to contribute and discuss with each other and our PD team via the live chat feature. Providing teachers time to share ideas and ask questions in PD sessions creates a more meaningful experience.



“Do not fall into the trap of purchasing a PD program and not creating awareness within your school.”



Teachers learn best from other teachers, that's why all presenters on OTIS are all former classroom teachers. Each PD team member has their own area of expertise and style of instruction. This makes it easy for your teachers to select courses that speak to their needs – whether that be based on grade level, content area, type of technology, or delivery method.

That said, even the best PD providers will not have everything specific to your school's needs. Sometimes the most beneficial PD is in-house. Many schools have teachers present workshops on scheduled PD days, often recording the sessions to provide to those that may not have been able to attend on that specific date. Platforms like OTIS allow you to upload content like this that is specific to your school and its workflows.

With OTIS for educators, we've created a service that provides meaningful PD on a wide variety of topics including edtech, distance learning, and

Another crucial element to online PD is the added benefit of more flexibility in terms of scheduling. On OTIS for Educators, we have a robust library of courses that are available anytime, anywhere. Educators can complete hours from home, at night, on weekends, or even on a mobile device while out and about. The ability to rewind and rewatch courses is also a huge benefit for teachers who might want to revisit a concept or practice skills they have learned. These types of functional flexibility make PD more accessible for all educators.

3 Differentiation isn't just for students

When selecting an online provider, you will want PD that addresses all disciplines and diverse learning needs. Good online PD uses modeling effectively, while building technological and pedagogical skills. In Teachers Know Best, teachers “suggest that the ideal professional learning experience should focus less on presentations and lectures and more on opportunities to apply learning through demonstrations or modeling and practice.”

social-emotional learning. Our online PD courses improve teacher pedagogy and student engagement on all levels, whether instruction is taking place in the classroom or remotely. We embed research-based best practices into our courses to model effective instruction and target student needs. Explicit skill instruction, student-directed activities, instructional strategies, and systematic student assessment are just a few examples of best practices that are embedded into our model. As Brian Moore, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment at East Pennsboro Area School District says, “[OTIS] is a fantastic platform that provides an incredibly diverse selection of instructional tech professional development opportunities that help revolutionize teaching and learning.”

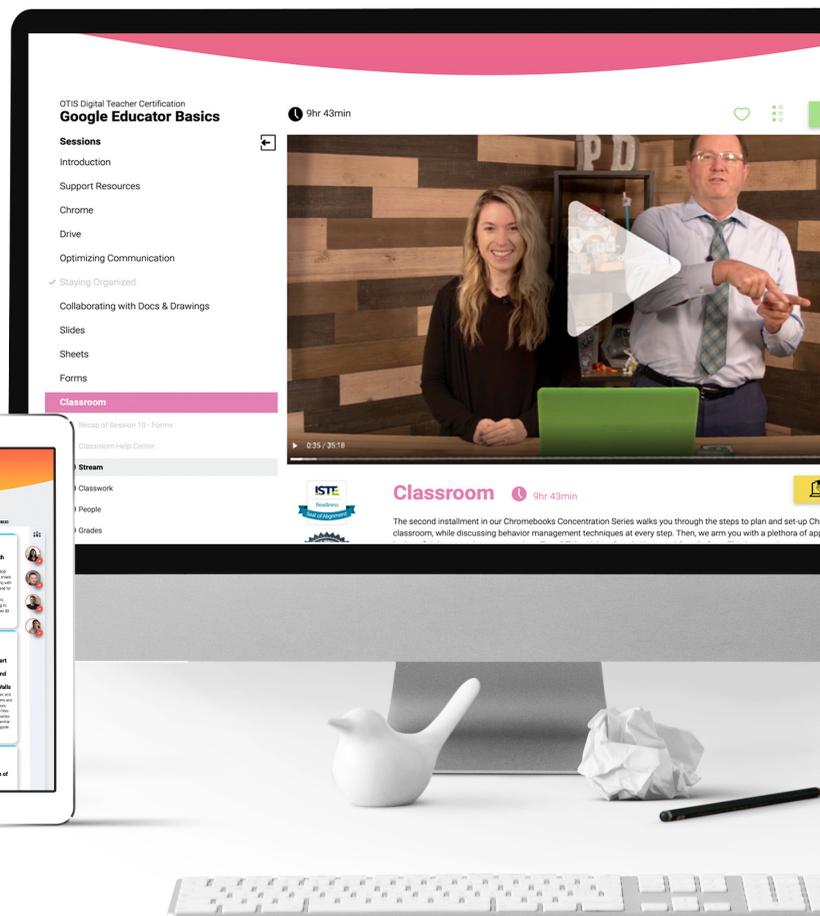
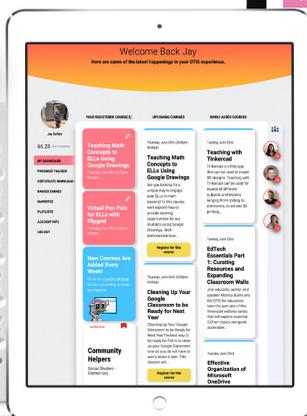
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Online PD in Action

How a mid-sized New York school district solved some of its most pressing professional development issues with one tool.

Dr. Don Murphy, Superintendent at Hauppauge Public Schools, which serves almost 4,000 students, says his district faced the same struggles as many others. It was tough to find PD that accommodated teacher schedules, available space, logistics, and that was budget friendly. In addition, with SMART Boards in every room and a 1:1 iPad program in grades 4-8, educator digital literacy was of increasing importance. After forming a working group to examine options, online learning emerged as the ideal solution. Here, Murphy shares his unique approach to implementing online professional development and the specific challenges it solved for his teachers and the entire district.

Why was it necessary to involve teachers in the decision-making process around a move to online PD?

Murphy: Over my career, I've learned that taking a top-down approach to implementation without acknowledging other perspectives and inviting key stakeholders leads to failure—no matter how fantastic your initiative is. Any district goal, initiative, or anything worthwhile, requires collaboration or partnership.

We learned about teacher pain points and what PD would look like if they could be the architects of their own learning. We heard comments like, "I would love to just do it from my own classroom." Or, "When you keep me after school to do PD, I'm missing my son's soccer match. I'd love to do it after soccer." And, "Sometimes teachers miss what was said during PD, so it would be great if sessions were recorded so teachers could rewind." Learning these things made it pretty clear that a platform like OTIS would work well for us.

Why was online PD the right approach for Hauppauge teachers and staff?

One of our district goals is to help teachers develop digital literacy skills. When we rolled out OTIS, there was so much positive feedback from teachers about how simple it is to use. After just one course, teachers told us there really isn't a learning curve. They love that they don't lose

time with their students and can access learning on their own terms. And it's teacher-created content; that's enormous credibility-wise. There's no better PD than teacher-to-teacher PD.

What does online PD look like at Hauppauge now?

We did a full rollout of OTIS for the 2018-2019 school year, and now we have around 400 teachers and teaching assistants on the platform. With OTIS, we can provide curated playlists that include district-mandated courses. In the beginning, many of those related to Google and Google Classroom but now include social-emotional learning, working with students with disabilities, working with English language learners and physical education. Last summer, we had some teachers do 50 to 60 courses on OTIS. That is just awesome! That's something we wouldn't have been able to facilitate without this platform. It's so powerful. And it's benefiting kids because now we've got these experts growing their skills.

Were there any unexpected benefits to choosing an online PD platform?

We can create our own content. That's changed the way we do business, in small and big ways. Our teachers can create content on their own time. Of course, we pay them for that, but the cost is less than having someone come onsite. And the content lives forever, so teachers can go back to it over and over again.

We had a middle school teacher create a course for incorporating Google Drawings in lesson plans and upload it to OTIS. A second-grade teacher in another building watched the video and created a fantastic lesson plan for an observation. The teachers had never met. These opportunities would never happen without this platform.

With thoughtful planning and teacher buy-in, Hauppauge was successful in building a PD culture that was able to support them in the rapid move to remote learning. Their educators now have a strong technology foundation and the digital literacy to be successful as they plan for the upcoming school year.

student outcomes or teacher practice. And it's not always clear what the goal of introducing a particular tool or strategy is: Higher test-scores? Improved student engagement? For evaluation, most districts default to giving teachers an exit survey at the end of a training event, said Dyane Smokorowski, the coordinator of digital literacy for the Wichita Public Schools in Kansas. "But that doesn't show impact," she said. "That's just like if I did or if I didn't like it."

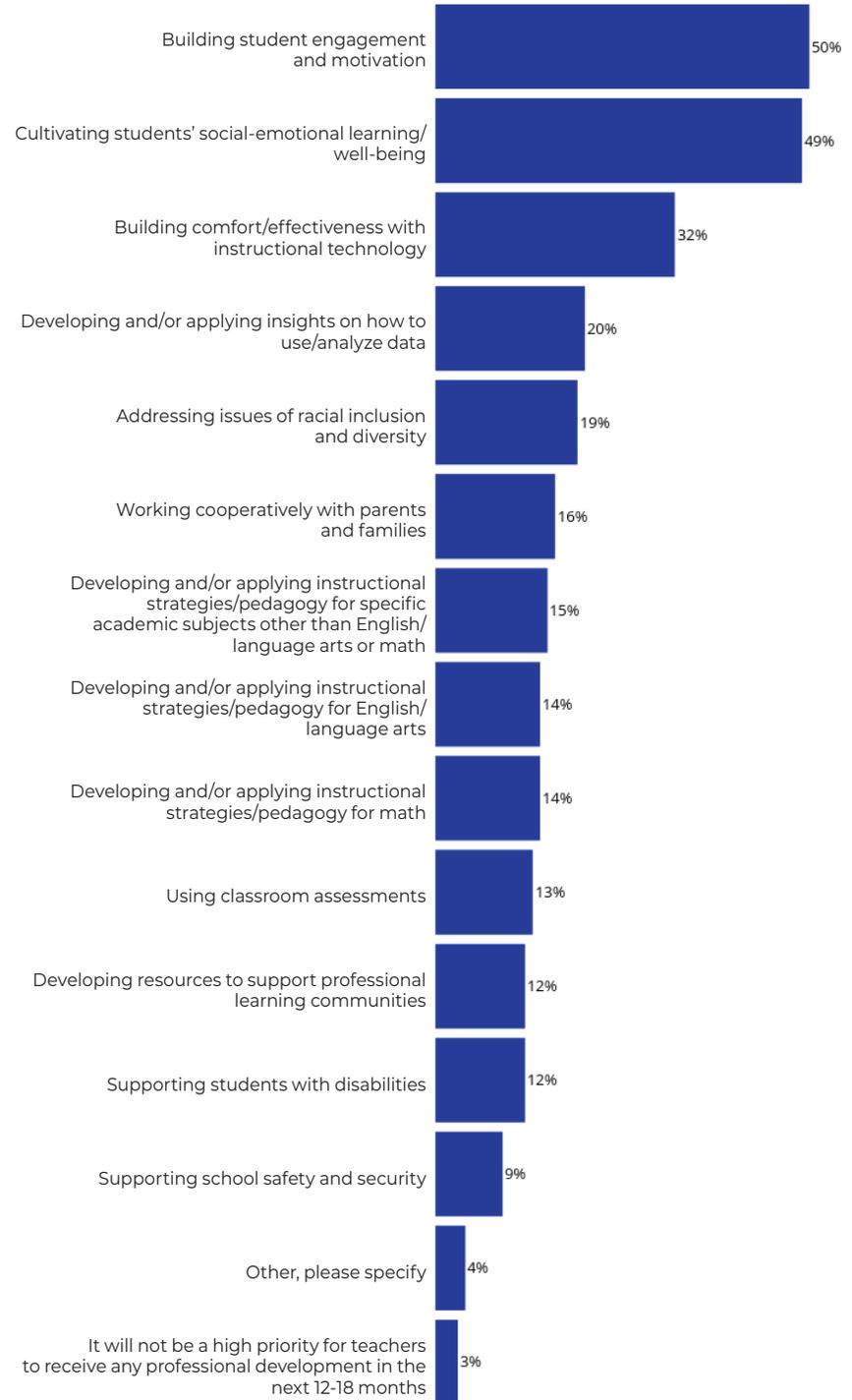
How to address it: Giving teachers time to contemplate their learning and how it fits in their broader, overall goals can be effective, both for helping them get more out of training and improving the overall professional development experience, said Smokorowski. She likes having teachers learn new skills in cohorts, and works to build in what she calls, "milestone reflection time." This summer, for instance, Smokorowski is running a multi-day training for about 30 teachers. After it concludes, and the school year is well underway, she'll follow-up, checking to see if participants have made progress toward implementing what they learned. She will also ask: What do you still need to know? What could I have done differently to help you be better prepared?

Ignoring the value of collaboration

The problem: Districts often don't ask teachers what they need from professional development. And they'll often tap outside experts, instead of finding someone in the school building—or the broader district—who has stellar skills in a particular area. "If Suzie down the hall is a rock star when it comes to differentiating instruction, she is a hidden treasure," Sanders said. "How do we tap into what she is doing and what she is doing well?"

How to address it: Districts need to get feedback from teachers about what they need and how they learn. And they should be willing to tap students to help inform professional development, Sanders said. What's more, districts should bring together educators who can benefit from teamwork, even if their jobs don't seem to be obviously connected. Virtual meetings have made that easier to do. For instance, in the Baltimore City school district, 5th grade science teachers will meet with 6th grade science teachers to talk about expectations and transitions. Special education teachers and those who work with English-language learners have also joined in science teacher trainings and in collaborative planning. The district says, "We'll make space for you," said Kara Ball, an elementary science and STEM education specialist with the district.

Over the next 12–18 months, which areas of professional development will be most important for teachers in your district? Select three (responses from teachers, principals, and district leaders).



SOURCE: EdWeek Research Center, 2021

Failing to offer choice

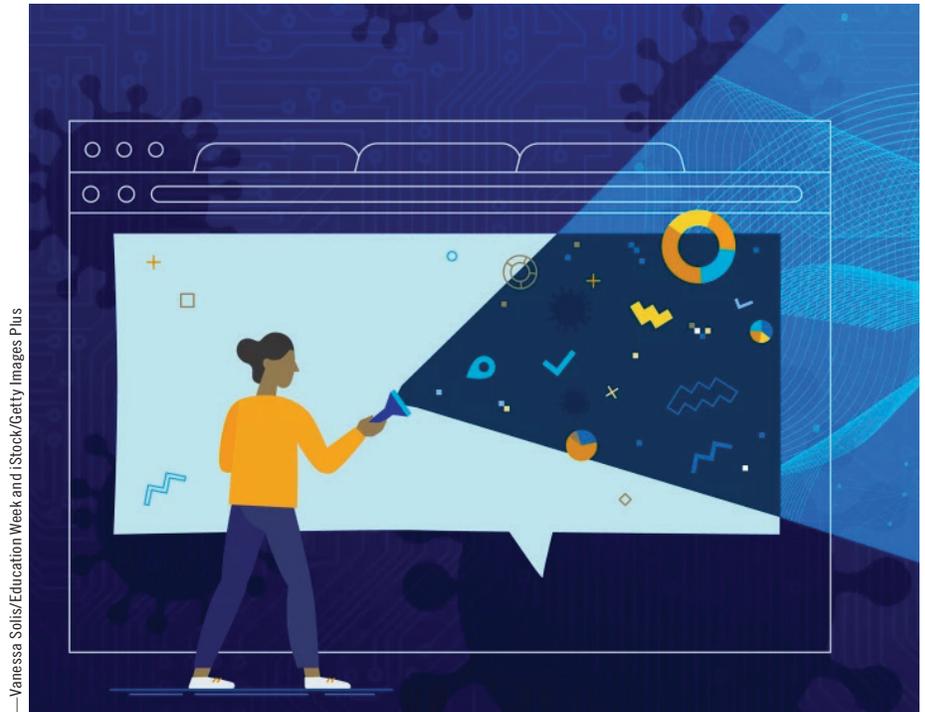
The problem: “Teachers are all at different places,” said Steve Langford, the chief information officer for the Beaverton school district, near Portland, Ore. Teachers are expected to differentiate instruction for students who have different abilities and needs, and districts need to model that with their PD, he said. “We don’t have the luxury of developing a single tech PD, “for everyone,” Langford said.

How to address it: The pandemic has spurred schools to rethink their professional development, sometimes in ways that led to greater personalization. Holly Doe, director of technology for the Bedford schools, near Manchester, N.H., said her district typically holds big PD events for all its teachers at the high school. But because of the pandemic, that wasn’t a possibility. So instead, the district offered online resources on key topics. Officials even created three types of sessions: bite-size, snack size, and meal size, so that educators could choose not just the area they needed help in, but also the time length. “There was choice in that day, and that choice was huge,” Doe said. The district is still planning its professional development for next year, and will take the positive teacher feedback on the virtual approach into account.

Discounting teacher PD fatigue

The problem: This has been one of the toughest school years imaginable. Most teachers’ technology skills have grown exponentially, but they may not have the bandwidth right now to absorb much more professional development, said Spencer Kiper, an instructional technologist in Louisiana’s Caddo Parish public school system. “You have people who are just severely burned out and do not have capacity to learn one more thing to help themselves survive instructionally with students.”

How to address it: Give teachers time to reflect on all they’ve learned and how it can reshape their practice, but only after they’ve “had a nap. They all need a nap,” Smokorowski said. During the pandemic, teachers banded together to help each other through a difficult time, and many of them became much more comfortable using technology, she explained. “But after school returns to in-person learning, “My fear is that we will go back to normal when we need to get back to better,” Smokorowski said. Teachers need space to ask themselves, “How are you going to make it better now that you have these nerd skills?” ■



—Yanessa Solis/Education Week and Stock/Getty Images Plus

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Lessons Learned From Teachers About How to Develop New Technology Skills

By Mark Lieberman

Kate LaBarbera teaches 2nd grade at the K-5 Carlton Avenue School in San Jose, Calif. Jaison Naiker teaches a social-emotional learning seminar called Connections to 7th graders at Surprise Lake Middle School in Milton, Wash.

Naiker was curious about how he might use new tech tools in his instruction even before the pandemic. LaBarbera, on the other hand, only used classroom technology on a limited basis, when it was necessary.

But both experimented with new technologies way outside their comfort zones during the pandemic, and, in the process, they developed new technology skills that they plan to keep using in the classroom next school year and beyond. They also have some strong opinions about how schools ought to tailor tech-related professional development so teachers—and, by extension, students—get the most out of it.



Jaison Naiker



Kate LaBarbera

The following Q&A is composed of interviews conducted separately. Naiker and LaBarbera’s comments were edited for length and clarity.

How much comfort did you have using technology as a teaching tool prior to the pandemic?

Naiker: Being [38], the age group that I’m in, I feel like I grew up learning all this technology as well. I’d say I was above average in terms of using it.

LaBarbera: We’re in a very tech-heavy district. I’m 51, so I don’t like to think of myself as old. I used technology and I tried,

but I wasn't as innovative with it. It was more in place of a worksheet instead of a teaching tool—just something different to keep the kids engaged.

I used things like Seesaw and Google Classroom, but not the way I do it now. Before it was more teacher-friendly, and now it's more student-based, so they can access it, kind of like a digital portfolio. Before it was like busywork.

Where did you turn to learn the new technology tools you wanted to incorporate into the classroom?

Naiker: I was trying to find a way of doing the old Socratic seminar remotely without having students actually discuss out loud, because they were so hesitant. I Googled in the words “socratic seminar remote,” or “socratic seminar digital,” and Parlay was one of the first things that came up as a tool. [The Parlay tool offers a platform for teachers to select discussion prompts, collect students' written responses, and facilitate thoughtful dialogue.]

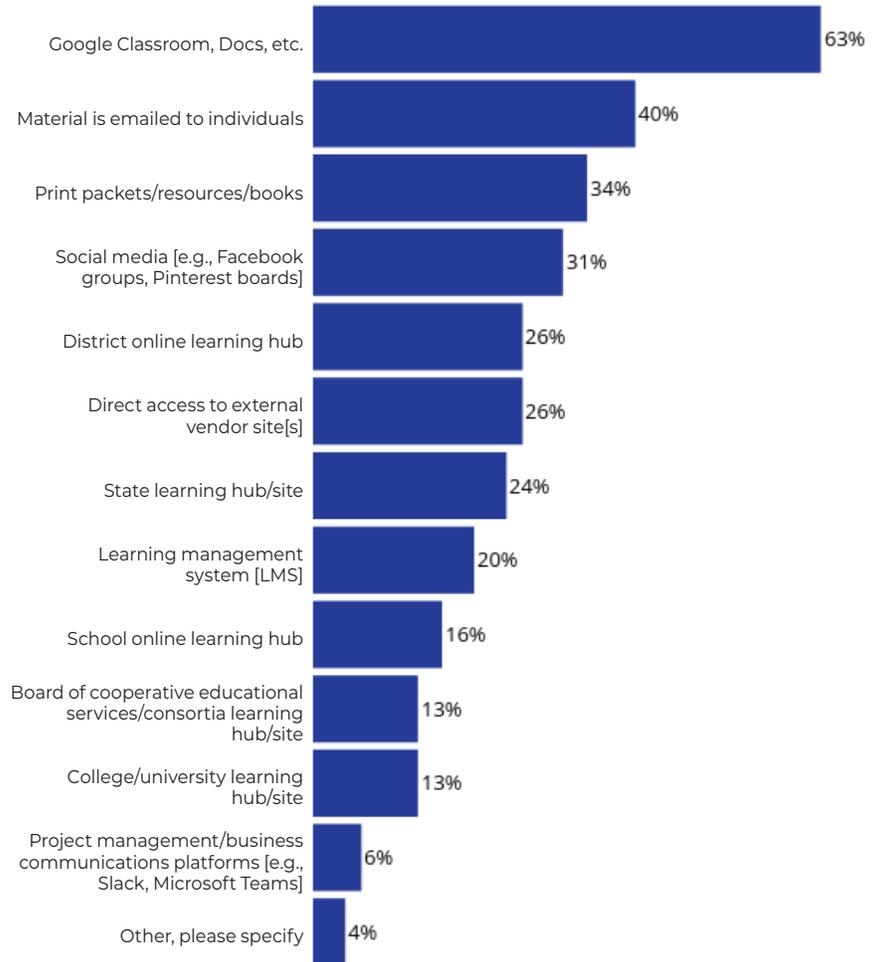
I felt like because of my comfort with technology, I was able to walk myself through quite a bit. A lot of these companies have done a really good job of creating these tutorials. That was the first thing that I went to—I'm going to watch this video and see an example of how this works.

LaBarbera: Prior to the pandemic, I had agreed to take a class [on online and blended learning, at the Krause Center for Innovation at Foothill College] over the summer with a friend. The friend ended up not taking the class, and I almost bailed out. But I decided to go ahead and do it. It was really out of my comfort zone. Of course, the class went to being taught online. To be taking a class virtually and teaching a class [remotely] at the same time was actually the best situation ever. Had I taken this class in person, I would not have used the stuff the way I'm using it now. From that group and cohort, then I signed up to get my online and blended learning credential.

What's an example of a new tech skill you developed during the pandemic, or a tool you started using to engage students?

LaBarbera: In the class, I was actually able to create work that my students would do the next week. In most of the classes I've taken, that doesn't happen. You're doing busywork. You're not doing work that directly goes to your students. I created lesson plans, videos—everything was very pertinent.

How do employees of your district or school access professional learning resources? Select all that apply (responses from teachers, principals, and district leaders).



SOURCE: EdWeek Research Center, 2021



Before, on Flipgrid and Quizizz, I would just search and see if somebody had already made what I was looking for. Now I'm creating my own things on those same platforms. Before, I never would have made an assignment on my own on Seesaw. I would have found someone else's, and if it didn't quite work, oh well, it was already made for me.

I didn't know how to do a poll before. The kids love the polls. Every day now, if I don't have a poll they're so disappointed.

Naiker: I started using podcasts to intro-

duce the students to a new way to learn. A lot of people are familiar with all the top podcasts, but they don't necessarily know what they're designed for or how they could be beneficial to them. So I had the students listen to a few podcasts—around MLK Day, we did one based on what they won't teach you in school, which was really fun only because it had an edgy title. When you give a student something that sounds a little bit edgy, immediately their engagement goes through the roof. One of the great ones I found is The

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The advice I gave to my colleagues was, instead of trying to learn something new, take some of these options that we have been using and just get really, really ridiculously good at using these options.”

JAISON NAIKER

7TH GRADE TEACHER, SURPRISE LAKE MIDDLE SCHOOL, HOLMEN, WISCONSIN

Big Fib—two people discuss what their line of work is, and you as the listener have to determine which one of the two people are lying or actually the expert.

How much more comfortable do you feel using technology in the classroom now than you did before the pandemic?

LaBarbera: I'm on a pretty young, tech-savvy team. Normally, I was the one saying, "I don't know how to do that." After taking the class, there were some things that I wanted to do that they weren't even really willing to do.

One of the first videos I made was on what to do if you get stuck. Walk away from your computer, take a break, send a message to your teacher, or let it go. Nothing is that important that you have to do it right now. I would get stuck too, while making the video. A lot of the experience was feeling the frustration that our students might be experiencing as well. Our professors would get kicked off Zoom, so you could kind of see how they handle it.

The class was life-changing. I don't know that I would have been this passionate about teaching online learners.

Naiker: One of the greatest things that students were so cool about, when you say to them, "I'm learning through this process as well, just as you guys are, I'm going to be trying a few things, they may blow up in

my face, but they may be really, really awesome." Showing students it's OK to make mistakes, it's OK to fail sometimes, you've got to take some chances.

What advice would you give to administrators putting together professional development opportunities for teachers like you?

LaBarbera: A lot of us spent a lot of time learning how to teach online, and a lot of platforms had their own trainings. But we didn't get paid for them. The hours that it saved me for sure were a payback. I'm now kind of a Zoom expert based on the classes that I took through Zoom. But we didn't get paid for them. It would be great for extra PD to be paid for, or to have been given paid time [during work hours] for it.

Naiker: Going into the summer of 2020, we were being bombarded with the number of technology options that were out there. The advice I gave to my colleagues was, instead of trying to learn something new, take some of these options that we have been using and just get really, really ridiculously good at using these options.

Every time you hear about a new technology tool, you feel like somebody's trying to sell you something. That feeling quickly got old, versus a colleague teaching you, "This has been really working for me in my classroom."

We have experts within our building who know the ins and outs of all of these tools. Instead of trying to go through these third parties or sit in on webinars, why don't we lean on the folks who are in the background? You're much more likely to stay engaged when you're listening to your colleagues teach you about something versus somebody that you probably won't see in the next week or month or two.

The idea of developing teacher leaders has always been something that has been really valuable. Relying on the cheerleaders in your building to be able to help disseminate information regarding new tech that they are potentially interested in. I don't know that I could emphasize enough that there are teachers across this nation who are so intelligent, so valuable, who are being underutilized. I know that that's possibly because they are overworked and underappreciated. I also believe that when you give them the opportunities like that to take leadership over something like a digital tool that could be super powerful for their students, I think that they'll rise to the occasion. ■



—Nick Agro for Education Week

Jason Hodgson, director of professional development at the Panama-Buena Vista Union School District in Bakersfield, Calif.

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How This District Leader Transformed Teacher PD

By Elizabeth Heubeck

When the coronavirus pandemic forced schools across the country to close last spring, many district leaders were gripped with anxiety because their teachers weren't ready to pivot to remote learning.

But not Panama-Buena Vista Union, a K-8 district of about 18,000 students in Bakersfield, Calif., in the Central Valley, about 155 miles north of Los Angeles.

And not Jason Hodgson, the school system's director of professional development, who had spent the last two years laying the groundwork for that moment—even though he didn't know it at the time.

When Panama-Buena Vista hired Hodgson in 2018 to overhaul its professional development program, officials had to coax teachers to attend the sessions because they took up a lot of time and delivered few benefits.

Just a month after arriving, Hodgson started working on what eventually became pbvU—

a kind of in-house university for district teachers that offers a suite of nearly 130 multiweek courses in English, math, science, and essential skills like classroom management.

The PD courses, which are taught primarily by Panama-Buena Vista teachers, provide seven hours of instruction, plus two periods each for reflection and implementation.

Teachers who demonstrate mastery receive credits that can move them up in the salary schedule. Accruing enough credits can put them in a brand new “seventh” column on the district’s salary scale, or on track to earn up to \$101,072 annually. (The starting teacher’s salary is \$50,000.)

So when the pandemic halted in-person instruction, Hodgson quickly got to work, transforming pbvU into an online university and helping the district’s nearly 1,000 teachers get up to speed on creating effective distance learning plans and honing the technical skills they needed to deliver those lessons successfully.

Hodgson and his team hosted 10 days of online training for teachers on Canvas, the learning management system. They also offered a dozen sessions in Spanish and English for the district’s 19,000 parents.

But he was not done. In the fall, Hodgson launched PBVUSD-Distance Learning through which teachers can earn three different levels of distance learning certification. The new feature also provides teachers with grade-level resources about online learning, specific instructional practices and lesson designs, and monthly tech tips.

Customized Professional Development

It helped that Hodgson had spent the last two years working with teachers to fine-tune pbvU to create courses that were tailor-made for the district’s needs and the unique challenges Panama-Buena Vista teachers faced in their individual classrooms.

“Jason does a great job of rolling with the punches,” said Valerie Park, the director of assessment, curriculum, and technology, who worked with Hodgson to prepare teachers and parents for remote learning.

“He’s very much a change agent and a problem-solver,” Park continued. “Without him, we would have been in trouble putting Canvas in place.”

School districts have long struggled to get PD right. Teachers are often dissatisfied with those sessions, reporting that they do little to help them acquire the skills they need to do their jobs or improve their practice, according

LESSONS FROM THE LEADER

- **Invest Big in Culture:** Trust first and often, embrace constructive conflict, invite mutual accountability, and celebrate risks and teamwork.
- **Lead with Learning:** With transparency and the best interests of others at the forefront, model humility, listening, and empathy while learning from and with others.
- **Focus on Results:** All students can learn, but some lack belief and hope. We must develop clarity with a narrow purpose and by regularly reviewing results and fostering a belief in ferociously pursuing continuous improvement.

to a 2015 report by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Districts also discover that unless PD is mandated—for example, required in collective bargaining agreements—many teachers don’t attend if the sessions aren’t held during school hours.

Panama-Buena Vista faced similar challenges with its veteran-heavy teaching staff when it went searching for its first-ever director of professional development.

Effective professional development is content-focused and job-embedded, with built-in opportunities for implementation and reflection, according to Maria E. Hyler, a senior researcher and deputy director at the Learning Policy Institute’s Washington office.

PbvU offers all of those things.

In just two years, Hodgson has made significant headway with pbvU, changing how the district’s teachers view PD by offering them relevant courses, taught mainly by their peers.

The built-in financial incentives and the ability for teachers to choose their own courses also make pbvU popular: 90 percent of the district’s teachers have participated in pbvU courses, and many of the classes are full. Waiting lists are not uncommon.

An overwhelming majority of teachers who have taken pbvU courses—90 percent or more—have consistently ranked them as “valuable” in surveys. (Teachers complete satisfaction surveys after finishing each pbvU course.)

“It’s a desired activity versus a required activity,” Hodgson said. “That has to be the sweetest piece of the system.”

Peggy Dewane-Pope, who has taught English language arts at the district’s Earl War-

ren Junior High School for the last two decades, can’t get enough of the pbvU courses.

“I signed up for five classes in one semester. You can only take three,” she said.

Dewane-Pope praised a social-emotional learning class that gave her just the right tools to resolve a longstanding classroom management issue with some students who frequently refused to do their work. Those encounters had often left her feeling frustrated and helpless.

The course helped her to realize that she was taking those incidents personally, instead of offering the non-compliant students choices.

“They’re not fighting me, but just fighting,” said Dewane-Pope, who called the class an “absolute game changer.”

“I got my B.S. in 1980. Here I am in 2019 getting this great material on how to deal with challenging kids.”

Despite the enthusiasm for the courses and the ability to increase their salaries, other districts may not recognize the pbvU credits, meaning that teachers may see salary cuts if they move to another school system.

Designed For Teachers, with Students at the Core

While pbvU empowers teachers to own their continuous learning, it was designed with students in mind.

“Oftentimes, a district forgets one or the other—students or staff,” said Hyler from the Learning Policy Institute. “It’s encouraging to hear those two pieces coming together.”

Hodgson has always been motivated by what’s best for children.

“
Effective professional development is content-focused and job-embedded, with built-in opportunities for implementation and reflection.”

EMARIA E. HYLER

SENIOR RESEARCHER AND DEPUTY DIRECTOR, THE LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE

The first in his immediate family to attend college, Hodgson initially intended to major in business administration. He switched to education after spending the summer between his freshman and sophomore years working at orphanages in Bucharest, the Romanian capital.

The dire conditions he saw changed his perspective. Even after he returned to the United States, the orphans remained on his mind.

“I just couldn’t take the lack of hope that kids there had,” Hodgson said.

He decided on a career that would allow him to help children pursue their passions, regardless of their life circumstances.

Hodgson’s first job as a 22-year-old teacher was at Arvin High School, an academically struggling school in the Kern High School District, where nearly all of the students qualified for the federal free- and reduced-price lunch program. Half of the students were English-learners.

It was there that he met Blanca Cavazos, the school’s principal, who later became his mentor. And it was from Cavazos that he learned the power of collaborative leadership. Her empathetic style with a fierce focus on students—the child of Mexican farm workers, she used her personal experience to champion equity initiatives, including bilingual education programs, for her students—reassured Hodgson that he’d made the right choice.

He has sought to emulate Cavazos’s collaborative leadership style throughout his career.

The true test came when he was revamping Panama-Buena Vista’s PD program.

“I knew we needed a professional development model that mirrored the research-based models where teachers were at the center of the work, as well as a model that contained all the hallmarks of continuous improvement—plan, do, study, act,” Hodgson said. “I also knew we needed to evaluate and reflect on our effectiveness routinely.”

A major challenge was getting teacher buy-in.

Hodgson used several creative approaches to get teacher support. He introduced the new initiative via podcasts, videos, and road shows, and enlisted teachers’ input on the logo, name, and other components.

Perhaps the most effective tool was the human capital piece—building trust.

He invited teachers to be part of the team. About 150 district teachers facilitate pbvU courses, and a Collaborative Work Group—a team of districtwide administrators and teacher representatives—provided feedback and tweaks to the original pbvU concept and continues to serve as advisors.

Panama-Buena Vista teachers aren’t the only ones giving pbvU high marks.

Kern County superintendent Mary Barlow praised Hodgson for his vision to rethink the structure and delivery of PD for busy teachers.

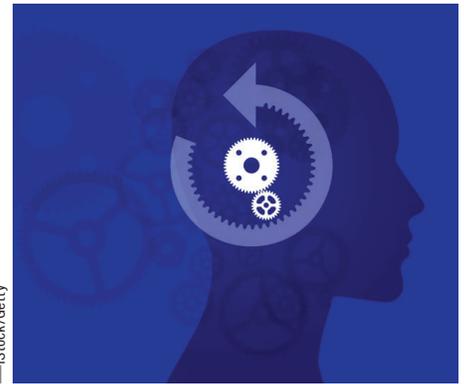
Barlow worked with Hodgson in 2016 when he was a management analyst at her office and the office was revamping its continuous learning programs.

“The pbvU concept has been embraced by educators for its foundation in continuous improvement, its relevance, especially during the COVID pandemic, and the fact that it is embedded in the district’s strategic approach to professional development,” Barlow said.

Several districts reached out to Hodgson after his presentation on pbvU at a California School Boards Association meeting last year. Hodgson and his team are also planning to expand pbvU in fall to offer a select group of high-interest courses in a blended learning format to teachers outside the district.

As he prepares to expand pbvU’s footprint, Hodgson is still enjoying the “honeymoon” phase of his job.

“It sounded too good to be true,” he said. “I get to work with a district-level leadership team that impacts students’ lives on a large scale, and to work with teachers who are passionate about creating hope.” ■



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Published on November 19, 2020

What Do Principals Want From Professional Development?

By Denisa R. Superville

While researchers have touted the benefits of mentors and coaches for school leaders, only about a quarter of elementary school principals say they have had access to a mentor or coach in the last two years, a new report finds.

That percentage was even smaller in high-poverty schools, where 10 percent of those principals said they had a mentor or coach during that period.

Access to the counsel and support from mentors and coaches varied based on the school leaders’ experience, with new and novice principals more likely to report having a coach or mentor.

Those are among the findings in a report from the National Association of Elementary School Principals and Learning Policy Institute looking at professional development for elementary school principals: access, quality, need, barriers, and ways to improve continuous learning for school leaders.

It was not all bad news. More than 80 percent of the principals who responded to the survey said they had participated in professional development on “managing change,” “creating collegial learning environments,” and school improvement. And large percentages said they’d had continuous learning opportunities to support students with disabilities, English

language learners, those from diverse backgrounds, and serve children equitably.

But there were key areas principals found lacking: Only 32 percent said they had opportunities to share leadership practices with colleagues three or more times in the last two years, and a little more than half—56 percent—had participated in professional learning communities.

“High-quality professional learning can equip principals with the knowledge, mindset, and skills to support effective teaching and to lead across their full range of responsibilities,” according to the report. “With this investment, principals are best positioned to foster school environments in which adults and students thrive.”

“If we want better schools and improved educational outcomes for our students, we must support and invest in high-quality professional learning opportunities for principals,” said L. Earl Franks, the executive director of the NAESP.

Principals said they needed professional development in key areas dealing with student well-being, among them:

- 83 percent in supporting students’ social-emotional development,
- 82 percent in supporting students’ physical and mental well-being,
- 76 percent in developing responsible young adults,
- 74 percent in leading schools with restorative justice practices, and
- 73 percent in developing students’ higher order thinking skills.

Creating equitable school communities was also an area that principals said they needed more training.

- 71 percent wanted PD on meeting the needs of students with disabilities,
- 64 percent wanted it to help support English-language learners, and
- 69 percent wanted such help on equitably serving all learners.

The kind of whole child efforts and equity training principals needed help with varied based on where principals worked, the study found.

Principals in suburbs were more likely

than principals in rural areas and cities to want professional development on supporting students from diverse backgrounds and English-language learners. And for whole child efforts, principals in cities were less likely than their rural counterparts to want professional development to support students’ physical and mental well-being.

That elementary principals say they need more continuous learning opportunities on whole child efforts is unsurprising. In the NAESP’s 2018 ten-year survey of principals, school leaders listed [student well-being](#) issues as their top concerns, specifically mental health, poverty, student behavior, lack of student supervision at home, and students’ safety and security.

Issues related to students’ well-being did not make the top 10 issues about which elementary school principals had “high” or “extreme” concerns in the previous once-in-a-decade study, published in 2008.

Addressing social-emotional issues has been a major concern for principals amid the coronavirus pandemic and racial unrest, and Franks said the organization has been working with principals to help them respond to the crises while attending to the well-being of their students and staff.

“We knew back in [2018] that SEL was important,” Franks said. “We still have a long way to go in providing the resources that are needed.”

The need could be attributed lack of money to hire additional counselors to help students, Franks said. But he also said that leadership-preparation programs are not equipping principals to have those kinds of discussions—whether it’s for their own emotional well-being or their staffs’ and students’.

Even when professional development was available, principals faced barriers. They often bumped up against money, time, and lack of

personnel—not enough people to take over their duties to give them time to attend the sessions.

Time appeared to be the most common enemy for principals looking to take advantage of professional learning opportunities, with 67 percent saying that time was an issue. Many principals do not have assistant principals who can cover for them while they take time off, Franks said.

And surprisingly, districts didn’t always help principals surmount the challenges they faced accessing professional development—a phenomenon more common among principals leading high-poverty schools and schools that enroll large numbers of students of color. While 87 percent of principals in low-poverty schools said their principals helped them overcome barriers to getting professional development, that fell to 65 percent among principals leading high-poverty schools. (Overall, the vast majority of principals said their districts supported their professional development.)

The report has a series of recommendations for district, state, and federal officials to bridge the gap and ensure principals participate in high-quality continuous learning opportunities.

They include expanding funding on the federal and state levels to offset the cost of those programs, as well as districts ensuring that the content is tailored to meet principals’ needs and that they are job-embedded.

“My hope is that this report can be used to inform district and state education leaders, as well as policymakers at the state and federal levels, on the current needs,” Franks said. “But it also lays out a blueprint for how they can support their leaders moving forward.”

The findings are based on the responses of 407 principals among a random sample of 1,000 school leaders who are members of the NAESP. ■

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OPINION

Published on April 27, 2021

‘A Professional Learning Community Is Not a Faculty, Grade Level, Or Department Meeting’

By Larry Ferlazzo

The question-of-the-week is:

What is a professional learning community and how can educators build one?

Marcela Falcone, Kathy Dyer, and Julia Thompson share their ideas.

Different Types of PLCs

Marcela Falcone is in her 20th year as a 3rd grade bilingual teacher in the Brentwood school district on Long Island in New York. She previously taught pre-K, 1st grade, and 2nd grade. Follow her on Twitter @marcela_falcone:

A professional learning community is a group of individuals who meet in person or online to share ideas in a collaborative way. For educators, it represents a process of learning as a collective team. A PLC is an ongoing journey of discovery.

It is important to understand that a professional learning community is not a faculty, grade level, or department meeting. A PLC is also not a school committee, such as one set up to decide on a new academic program. These types of learning environments may include individuals with a shared vision, but a PLC is more aligned

with continuous improvement over time.

A central function of a PLC is reviewing, analyzing, and discussing best practices in classrooms and schools. It includes educators with a shared vision and the same mission to improve as professionals. The community may evolve over time, but a focus is always on researching and evaluating ways to take effective action in the best interest of students and the school community.

Within a school or district, a professional learning community may include faculty and staff members with similar responsibilities, such as teachers from the same grade level. A PLC may also be formed with educators in different academic departments. Overall, members will have a common understanding of the socioeconomic status and student population of the school community. For example, as colleagues, it might be easier to discuss topics related to curriculum, assessments, or extracurricular activities. But the absence of an outside perspective and knowledge base can negatively impact the overall progress of the PLC.

Another type of PLC is educators from various school districts in the same geographic area coming together. These groups might discuss a broad range of issues related to the region. In addition to conversations on curriculum, topics may include school safety,

transportation, and other issues specific to the county or state.

A third type of professional learning community is one that you can build on your own. This PLC can be created through active participation in professional organizations, education associations, and collaborating on social media. The key is staying active in initiatives and community activities.

To find a professional organization, you can collaborate with other individuals who share responsibilities in your own school. There are associations related to general education purposes, along with very niche groups. Mentors and veteran educators can make recommendations to you based on your specific position in the field.

Technology advances have presented a wonderful opportunity for educators to connect with each other across the country and from around the world. On social media, Twitter has become a leading platform in developing a virtual PLC. A search of hashtags related to education highlights many opportunities. Examples of hashtags include #pdquandme, #edtechchat, and #ellchat_BkClub. In many instances, you can join the PLC by connecting with the coordinator on the platform.

Facebook, LinkedIn, and other social platforms provide many features to support professional learning communities. For example, these networks allow for the creation of groups to facilitate interactions. Video-conferencing apps like Zoom and Skype also continue to become more popular in improving virtual connections.

Members of a virtual PLC may read the same books or review specific curriculum resources. The completion of a book or conversation topic is simply part of the overall learning process. For both in-person and online communities, the PLC represents an ongoing journey of collaboration, development, and improvement for educators.

To build a professional learning community, it is important to understand what you can offer the group. A new teacher can provide a fresh set of eyes to school-based issues and learning initiatives. For veterans, the facilitation and exchange of expert analysis can have a profound impact on professional growth and educational improvements.

‘Voice & Choice’

Kathy Dyer is an innovative educator with over 25 years’ experience. She served as a public school teacher, principal, and district assessment coordinator. Kathy researches, designs, and delivers professional learning opportunities for educators

across the United States and around the world:

While the term “professional learning community” (PLC) is widely used in education it has a variety of meanings and may be known by other names. From the early days of Rick DuFour and Bob Eaker, the term has signified a collaborative team who

- shares mission, vision, and values
- learns from one another
- publicly reflects
- practices inquiry
- demonstrates a willingness to experiment
- is action-oriented

Building a PLC

Provide voice and choice: Teachers, like students, need and appreciate choice. Choice within a given framework or focus allows teachers to determine their priorities for changes to classroom practice. Voice may come into play when deciding if the PLCs will be grade-level-focused or content or vertical or...

Start with the foundation

Trust is key. Focusing on collaboration rather than competition may be new for some, as may be suspending judgment. Some of this foundation building may be accomplished with the development of a shared mission, vision, and values. Not everyone knows how to *collaborate* so spending a little bit of time on that may be useful. Learning how to ask questions that don't make people defensive might be worth talking or reading about. Providing *feedback* is a similar topic. The more we learn and practice collaborating and giving feedback, the better we get at both.

Time is another foundational aspect of PLCs. Regularly allowing enough time for teachers to meet, learn, and work through what surfaces demonstrates both the importance of the activity and the trust given to the group.

Provide small steps

Learning is incremental. Inquiry takes time. Providing protocols to spark inquiry and personal reflection is one way to teach PLCs how to create new habits of collaboration. It takes time to change practice. Provide voice and choice for PLC members in what the learning focus will be.

Build collegial support

PLCs provide opportunities to develop personal action plans, to report back to a peer group about what happened as a result of implementing those plans, and to reflect and receive feedback and support from colleagues who are working on the similar changes in practice.

Building a PLC may not be easy, but it is worth it. Numerous resources talk about improved teaching AND learning, and that's why we do it. Professional educators participating in highly functioning PLCs report feeling renewed and invigorated by discovering common ground, clarifying the focus, learning together, and monitoring what's happening using collaborative processes. It's about helping educators get better at what they do so students can learn more. It's about learning with, from, and for one another.

Teacher Action Research

After receiving her B.A. in English from Virginia Tech, Julia Thompson spent 40 years teaching in Arizona, North Carolina, and Virginia. Author of several books for teachers:

In the most general sense, a professional learning community is simply a group of educators with a shared goal such as increasing their understanding of a subject, solving a common problem, or developing skills in a particular area. The most helpful communities in a school are not always those that are mandated by administrators but rather are those informal and dynamic partnerships that teachers create for themselves. These communities exemplify collaboration at its best because everyone involved is focused on working together to meet the group's goals.

An excellent example of this type of informal learning community is a book study group where several colleagues read the same book and then meet to discuss their reading. Although a school study group tends to be geared to pedagogical issues, I once taught at a school where our entire English department read the works of Thomas Hardy together. It took quite a long time to plow through the reading, but the results were worth it. I learned a great deal about literary analysis, picked up practical tips for presenting literature to teens, and bonded with my colleagues as we gossiped about what was happening to our characters in the fictional Victorian world.

Another type of teacher-created learning community that can be particularly helpful is one that is devoted to action research. By its very nature, action research is initiated by teachers who identify an issue or problem

that they want to investigate such as helping students learn to use effective study strategies. The group meets and formulates a potential solution and generates ways to apply it to the problem. The members of this learning community then collect and analyze data to determine the effectiveness of their possible solution. Together they decide whether to continue with the solution, tweak it, or even discard it in favor of another one. This professional learning community works well because its members are focused on problem-solving issues that they have identified themselves.

One of the biggest problems educators face when trying to establish a professional learning community is that there is so little free time at school to meet even if everyone involved has the same planning periods. The most obvious way to surmount this problem is to reach out electronically. Using our school's email system, I once started a professional learning group that I called The Community within a Community. Every day, as curator of the group, I sent out a quick message, a link, a meme, a reminder of a school event, or asked for opinions and advice. Our little group quickly grew into a schoolwide digital teacher's lounge consisting of experienced and beginning teachers all sharing ideas and supporting each other in a wide variety of ways. Our only caveats: Every post had to be about educational topics, be of interest to the entire group, be professional in tone and content, and be supportive of the members of the group. The positive effects of this informal learning community made the work of maintaining it well worth the effort.

Although there is merit in participating in assigned professional learning communities and in developing an online network of supportive colleagues, don't hesitate to use the resources that are available to you in your own building. Every school has as many experts as it does staff members; and their expertise is enhanced by their knowledge of the school culture and willingness to work with colleagues for the benefit of everyone. Just ask.

Thanks to Marcela, Kathy, and Julia for their contributions! ■

Larry Ferlazzo is an English and social studies teacher at Luther Burbank High School in Sacramento, Calif.

▶ This is final post in a four-part series.

You can see Part One [here](#), Part Two [here](#), and Part Three [here](#).

OPINION

Published on September 14, 2021

If You're Conducting PD, Seek Engagement With Educators

By Peter DeWitt

Several years ago, I was running workshops and feeling as though they were one-sided. As much as I loved delivering content, meeting educators, and engaging in conversations, I felt that there was something missing. Many of us who facilitate workshops have bios, which many directors of professional development use to introduce us at the beginning of each session. However, I wanted to know more about the audience than just what I heard from the directors on a pre-engagement conference call.

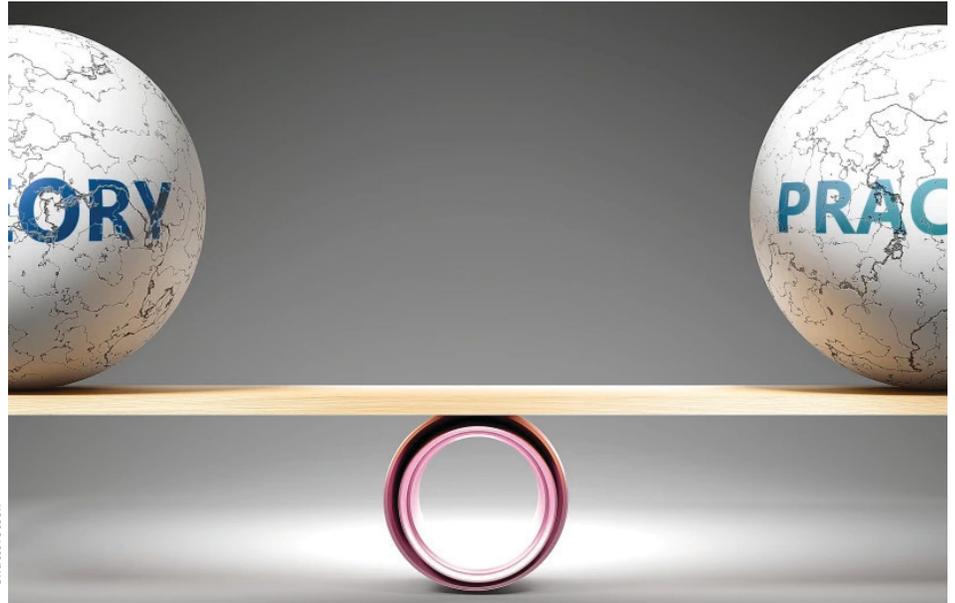
As a former teacher of 11 years and a school principal for eight years, I always took time to get to know students, teachers, and families. Of course, much of that was due to the fact that we are trying to engage in a community when we teach or lead. Still, why can't we create a sense of community within the time it takes us to run a workshop?

I took to Facebook and posted a question on my wall. I wrote that I was trying to find a way to engage with audiences before I showed up in person to actually engage with the audience and asked my "friends" if they had any suggestions. Pernille Ripp, the renowned teacher, literacy advocate, and all-around good human, responded by asking if I ever thought about using pre-engagement surveys. I answered that I had not, but I was interested in creating one.

So, I did...

I took some time to ask the basic questions, such as their location (i.e., country, state, city) to differentiate among the surveys since I had multiple engagements on the calendar. I asked their position within their school, so I could connect the content to their context. I asked if they were in an urban, rural, or suburban setting and then began asking a few deeper questions such as:

- What they wanted out of the session
- Their biggest challenge
- Their specific area of need
- What they knew about instructional leadership



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- What they knew about student engagement and how they currently engaged students
- Those of us who run workshops should be more interested in our audience, so I asked a few more open-ended questions such as:
 - What did they wish the presenter knew about them
 - What was one question they wished I had asked that I didn't

Over the years since using pre-engagement surveys, I have received some deep and reflective responses that changed the way I felt about running workshops.

What I Have Learned

For full disclosure, there were many participants who never filled out the survey. However, there were many more who took time to fill out the survey, and their answers provided me with insight into their challenges or areas of growth, as well as their positions, so I could make sure that the content fit into their context.

Equally as important to all of the information they provided about their positions and needs

was the fact that they wanted to provide me with insight into how hard they work or their passions.

Some examples are:

That I have struggled to gain basic foundations of educational practices, but that I gain "bits and pieces" and have a broken understanding ... and have gained mentoring in broken environments and over the last 4 years, I have strived to become a great educator and will continue to strive to do better each year. Teaching is becoming a love for me, and I cannot imagine my life different now, even with all of the real-world experience I have before now.

I am a classroom teacher who is currently enrolled in the Educational Leadership master's program through USM. I am very passionate about instructional leadership and looking forward to learning more about implementing instructional leadership schoolwide.

Sometimes their examples provide me with an important heads-up such as:

1- that we are adults and will need some leeway in directing our own learning 2- it is always helpful to have leaders model the best instructional prac-

tices, not just lecture about those practices.

Or...

I don't know who you are, have never heard of you or read your books, but in looking at your work on safeguarding LGBTQ students, I am intrigued. I just hope you are better than the last guy who showed up and had us build houses out of popsicle sticks.

Why We Should Do It

I'm thankful for the guidance Pernille gave to me because as workshop facilitators, activators of learning, or whatever we may call ourselves, if we truly read the responses on the pre-engagement surveys, we will be much better prepared when we meet our audiences in person or remotely.

Educators, especially now during COVID,

need to feel valued and heard. They don't need more experiences where they are talked at, and pre-engagement surveys can help us foster ways to inspire active learning and not just sit-and-get.

Even for the on-demand, asynchronous courses I teach through Thinkific, I do pre-engagement surveys because the process allows me to connect with those taking the courses in deeper ways, and in many instances, creates a relationship or friendship that can last much longer than the time it takes them to take the course.

In the End

As workshop facilitators and providers of professional learning and development engage with audiences around content that will hopefully help impact student learning, one of the important components that they can

focus on is how to engage participants before they ever actually meet.

Pre-engagement surveys do not have to be lengthy; in fact, it is better if they are not. Asking a mixture of content-related questions along with open-ended questions is key. Using the answers to the pre-engagement surveys in the workshops is also necessary so participants understand we listened and learned from them.

Again, for full disclosure, I'm always looking for ways to be more human in my interactions. Running workshops is an honor, and I should not be the focus because the learners in the room and the content should be the focus. Pre-engagement surveys go a long way to help that happen. ■

Peter DeWitt is a former K-5 public school principal turned author, presenter, and leadership coach.

OPINION

Published on September 13, 2021

Some Teachers Are New to Laptop Integration. Here's How to Manage It



By Larry Ferlazzo

The question-of-the-week is:

Many teachers will now be teaching for the first time in the physical classroom with students who have laptops every day. What are your suggestions for how teachers incorporate them in lessons and what classroom-management guidelines should govern how and when they are used?

Ruth Okoye, Jennifer Orr, Stephanie Smith Budhai, Ph.D., Joshua Tabor, and Stepan Me-khitarian share their recommendations.

'Keep the Learning Authentic'

Ruth Okoye is the K-12 director at The Source for Learning. She has over 30 years of experience as a reading teacher, CTE teacher, literacy coach, and district-level ed-tech coach:

First, teachers should get comfortable with the fact that they will make mistakes. The first time you do anything, you don't do it perfectly. The beginning of the year is a perfect time to establish routines and procedures for laptops as well as other instructional materials. Students should help establish the processes and procedures, so they can buy into them and help reinforce them.

Pace yourself. While teachers who are experienced in teaching in 1:1 situations may be able to manage students having free access to the technology at any time, it's probably not where they started. Feel free to establish times when students should have laptops out and when they should not. This allows you to plan for the technology-integrated portions of your lesson and to know that if things go awry, the entire lesson isn't lost. Set a goal and challenge yourself to use the laptops for a portion of each

lesson a few times a week at first. As you build your skill and confidence with using the technology, you can add more days per week and/or longer activities.

Make the students your allies. Acknowledge that you are learning—probably along with them—and engage them in helping each other. Establish a system that allows students to ask for help without interrupting the rest of the class. Students who have demonstrated proficiency can be part of your “tech squad” tasked with helping others who may be struggling or even helping you. Be sure to get feedback from the students on what works or doesn't when you try a new technology integrated activity.

Keep the learning authentic. Research tells us that technology works best in the classroom when students use it to complete authentic work tasks. Yes, there is a place for review games and automated quizzes, but if you want to create an environment ripe for deep learning, you need to go beyond those types of activities. Think of how students will need to use technology in college and in the workforce and use those types of activities: research, communication, data analysis, presentations, etc. Help them begin to learn to do those tasks now while you can provide scaffolding by way of templates and structured activities.

You need to learn, too. Teaching with laptops is very different from using one yourself. If your school or district offers training, be sure to take advantage of it. If no training is offered, find some places to take free workshops on using the tools already in use at your school. There

are a number of people and organizations that offer them and are invested in making sure teachers can make the best of this opportunity. Be careful to not spread yourself thin by trying to learn about all the tools at once. Get proficient with one tool at a time and find a way to share what you learn with your peers to create a learning community. It will help if you travel this new road with a few friends.

Making Connections

Jennifer Orr is in her third decade of teaching elementary school students in the suburbs of Washington. She is a national-board-certified teacher, mom to two teenagers, and an obsessive reader of books of all kinds:

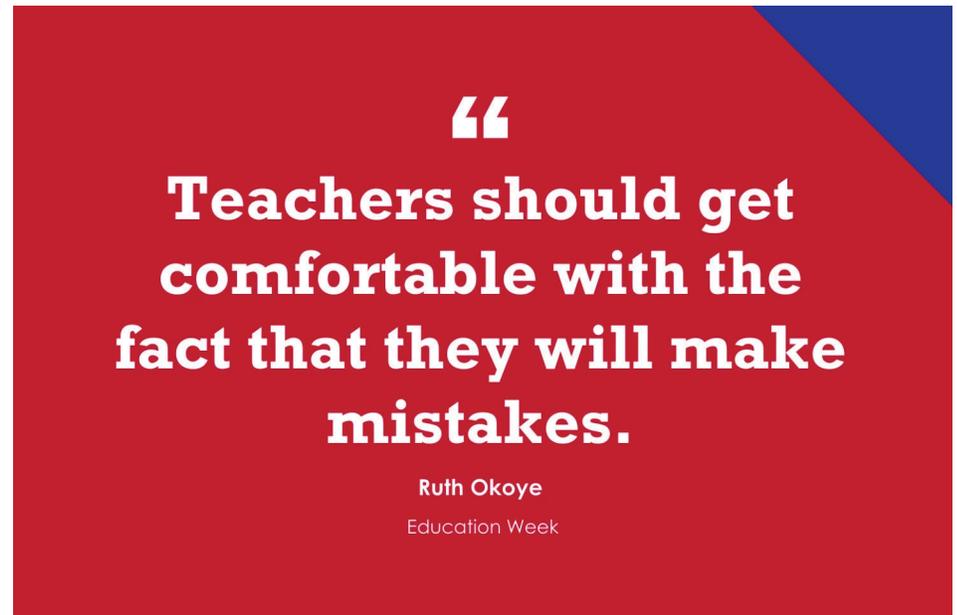
As an early-childhood educator who has had a passion for technology for many years, this is a question I have spent a lot of time considering. The answer may look very different depending on the age of your students, of course.

With our youngest learners, it is important to me that any screen time I am requiring of them is immensely valuable. Children are spending a lot of time with screens, and, for all of my love of technology, I have concerns about that. So this is a question I take very seriously.

I believe we should be using laptops when they offer us the opportunity to do things we would otherwise be unable to do. Throughout the pandemic, laptops and the internet made it possible for us to continue teaching and learning together in virtual classrooms. That would have been impossible without the technology. In a physical classroom together, I think we must be careful not to replicate what we did in our virtual year, at least not without careful consideration.

One of the things laptops offer is the ability to connect with others. This might be in very specific ways, such as having email pen pals or video calls with students in another part of the country or the world. Several years ago, when I was teaching 1st graders, we partnered up with a class in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. Throughout the year, we had many whole-class video calls, individual video calls, and opportunities to write to each other. I'll never forget, in the spring, when the other teacher and I took our students outside for recess with our devices and the kids were astounded at the difference. My students were in shorts and T-shirts, and her students zipped up their snowsuits as they still had significant snow on the ground. I've never had 1st graders more clearly understand the differences that geography can make.

Other connections might be broader. Students can post their writing or art creations online to share with others. They can com-



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Teachers should get comfortable with the fact that they will make mistakes.

Ruth Okoye

Education Week

ment on each other's work. We have a class blog. At the start of the year, I post pictures and information about what we're doing at school. As the year continues, students are able to create the posts for their families to see. Laptops offer children an opportunity for a broader audience for their work. Knowing that someone beyond their teacher will read their stories or essays or see their art or hear their performance is highly motivating. Students invest more energy and effort into their work.

My guiding question, when it comes to laptop use in elementary school, is: Am I replicating what I would normally do or are we doing something new, something we can't do without this device? It is easy for me to fall into the trap of turning worksheets into digital activities, just for the novelty the laptop brings. After the past year, my guess is that novelty will not be as significant, making my goal that much more important to me. We'll use our laptops to connect, to share, to encourage, to code, and to discover.

'New & Exciting Content'

Stephanie Smith Budhai, Ph.D., is a former teacher holding K-12 instructional certifications in technology education, instructional technology, special education, elementary education, and computers, business, and information technology. She is the co-author of Increasing Engagement in Online Learning, Teaching the 4Cs with Technology, and the author of the forthcoming book, Leveraging Digital Tools to Assess Student Learning:

Laptops are not new to physical classrooms. For the past 10 years or so prior to the recent pandemic, one-to-one and byod (bring your

own device) programs were emerging and becoming very popular in many K-12 schools. The availability of laptops for all students, in even more schools, provides a tremendous opportunity for teachers to transform curriculum, instruction, and assessment in their classrooms. As teachers incorporate laptops into lessons, they should leverage some of the best practices from schools that have had one-to-one programs already for years.

With each student in the classroom having a laptop, teachers can bring in new and exciting content that would not be otherwise possible. Ditch the reliance on textbook pictures or even YouTube videos of cultural artifacts and landmarks around the world. Take advantage of free immersive content through Google Arts and Culture. Take students on virtual field trips to different museums around the world such as the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City, the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, and even the Smithsonian museums in Washington.

Use the laptops for game-based formative assessment, which will allow you to capture data in real-time while the students are not even aware that they are being assessed. Kahoot, Gimkit, and Jeopardy Labs are just a few ed-tech tools that can be used for game-based assessment. Since you are capturing data on student learning during class time, adjustments to the lesson can be made immediately, and learning gaps can be quickly identified. In science classes, each student can immerse themselves in virtual simulations and labs through websites such as PhET and Labster. Peers can collaborate on shared projects, and

online content can be collectively curated using a tool such as Wakelet.

While the thought of students having access to a laptop during the school day can be frightening to teachers, as long as you plan for intentional technology use in the classroom that is not only aligned with curriculum, instruction, and assessment but also interesting, engaging, and fun, students will not have the time to wander off on the internet as they will be engaged in the learning experiences at hand. Having said this, it is always good practice to have guidelines and acceptable-use policies for safe use of ed-tech that students should be aware of, sign off on, and follow in their everyday use of their laptops in school.

'Don't Forget to Have Fun!'

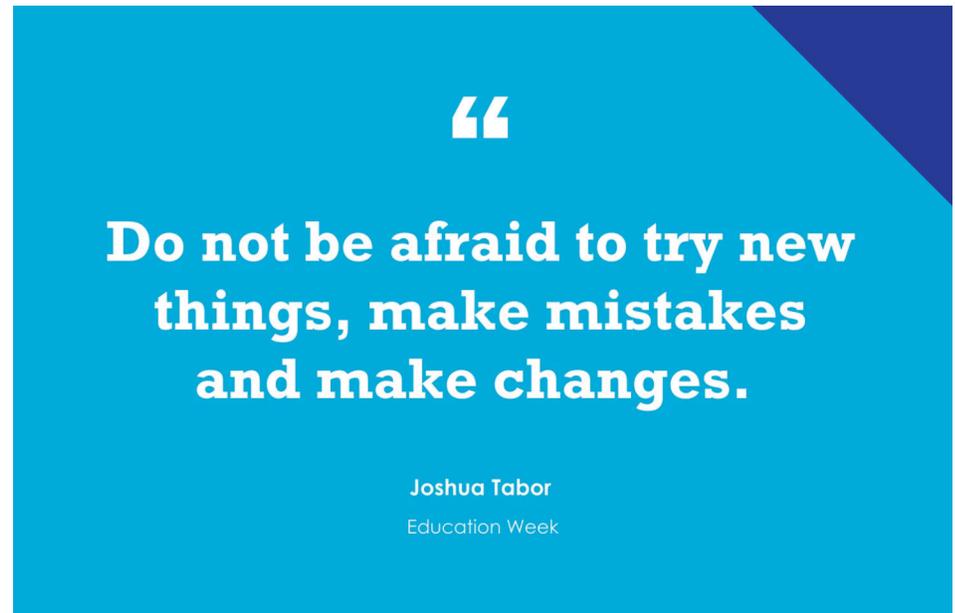
Joshua Tabor is a digital learning specialist in Denton ISD and an adjunct professor at the University of North Texas:

Let me start by saying, technology is not always the answer. Just because students have a device does not mean it must be used every day. Technology use should be woven through your curriculum when it fits, not forced in just because it is available.

Classroom management will be the key to success of having devices in the classroom. You should determine how you expect students to behave when their devices are active and what they should do when they are not needed. If you allow students to type notes while you are teaching, what are your expectations? What do you expect when they are working independently on their devices? Answering these questions will set you on your management path. I would also advocate you allow your students to help set expectations, as this will create buy in.

When using technology, do not fall into the trap of thinking students know how to use their device for productive purposes. You must help them find their way, just as you would with any other classroom tool. I would encourage giving grace because some students struggle with this amount of freedom. For some teachers, their initial reaction to technology misbehavior is to remove the device, but think of it like this: If you catch a student passing a note, you wouldn't take all their paper because they need it to complete their work. Why would you then do that with technology when the same is true?

When planning your lessons, make sure to set your learning standards FIRST, then determine what technology helps your students the most. Tools such as Flipgrid, Nearpod, Google, Microsoft, etc., are great, but if your students do not understand what they are supposed to



learn and why, the tools are irrelevant. Never let the technology overpower your lesson.

When incorporating your technology tool, know how it works from both your perspective and your students'. One of the biggest issues that trip up teachers is when their students cannot log in to a tool or use it with their chosen device. For example, if your students are using Chromebooks, make sure the tool you want is functional with that device. If it is not, find an alternative.

Ultimately, do not be afraid to try new things, make mistakes, and make changes. Let your students be your partners in this new journey and don't forget to have fun!

Focus on 'Learning Over Monitoring'

Stepan Mekhitarian serves as the interim director of innovation, instruction, assessment, and accountability at Glendale Unified school district in California. His book, The Essential Blended Learning PD Planner: Where Classroom Practice Meets Distance Learning, is available now from Corwin Press:

To plan how we will use devices in the physical classroom, we need to think about how they were used in distance learning. For over a year, devices were an essential tool to access lessons and communicate with teachers and peers. With the transition to in-person instruction, the role of devices can shift from a logistical necessity to a resource to enhance learning through individualized differentiation, collaborative higher-order-thinking projects, and learning opportunities that cater to different learning modalities.

- **Individualized differentiation.** This is arguably the greatest benefit of instructional technology. When used effectively, devices can offer differentiated supports, customized learning opportunities, and opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery through a variety of approaches. Consider how you will incorporate these experiences into your in-person lessons using devices and how you will measure student success when it is presented in varied ways.
- **Collaborative higher-order-thinking projects.** Devices create unlimited possibilities for research and collaboration, offering access to rigorous project-based-learning opportunities that involve exploration, meaning-making, and analysis. Maximize their use by raising expectations for deeper discovery and providing supports for students to meet and exceed them. Utilize devices the way you would other resources such as textbooks, referring to them as needed; discussions and collaboration can take place in person. Devices should be used to enhance learning, not as a primary source of communication as they were during distance learning.
- **Learning opportunities that cater to different learning modalities.** Use devices in conjunction with in-person learning to support a variety

of learning modalities to maximize learning. Auditory and visual learning can be enhanced through instructional technology while in-person strategies can serve kinesthetic and tactile learners. In a blended learning classroom, teaching strategies for learners can be employed to ensure access and success for all students.

Classroom management will also look different from what it did in distance learning. While it may be enticing to employ a program to monitor device use, that may lead to more time spent monitoring behavior and less time on instruction, where the teacher's expertise is most needed. Instead, consider establishing classroom expectations for device use and setting up your classroom in a layout that is conducive to movement and collaboration. You can move around the room to monitor progress, check for understanding, and ensure students are working toward mastery. Set up your room for success by:

- **Ensuring mobility and access.** Create a classroom layout that allows you to easily reach any student within a few seconds to provide support while also

facilitating seeing students' devices as you move around the room.

- **Focusing on learning over monitoring.** Movement facilitates engaging with students, answering questions, and checking for understanding in an authentic way that will be difficult to replicate from behind a computer used to monitor student devices. By connecting with students at their tables, you are sending the message that you are focusing on learning and students will prioritize what you are putting emphasis on.
- **Eliminating hurdles for learning.** Classroom management is more effective when technical hurdles are removed. Set clear instructions for picking up and charging devices and how students can access technical support. One helpful strategy is to create a QR code for students to scan when they need help to access screen casts, how-to instructions, and other resources you have created to address

technical questions. These resources can be collaboratively developed with other teachers to save time.

Blended learning may be yet another transition from in-person, distance, and hybrid learning, but it is where we have needed to be all along. Distance learning and hybrid learning stem from logistical necessities rather than instructional ones. In-person learning can be enhanced using devices for collaborative projects not previously possible. It's time to use the best of distance learning and in-person instruction to establish a blended learning classroom that utilizes devices to take learning to a new level.

Thanks to Ruth, Jennifer, Stephanie, Joshua, and Stepan for contributing their reflections. ■

Larry Ferlazzo is an English and social studies teacher at Luther Burbank High School in Sacramento, Calif.

▼ **This is the final post in a two-part series.** You can see Part One [here](#),

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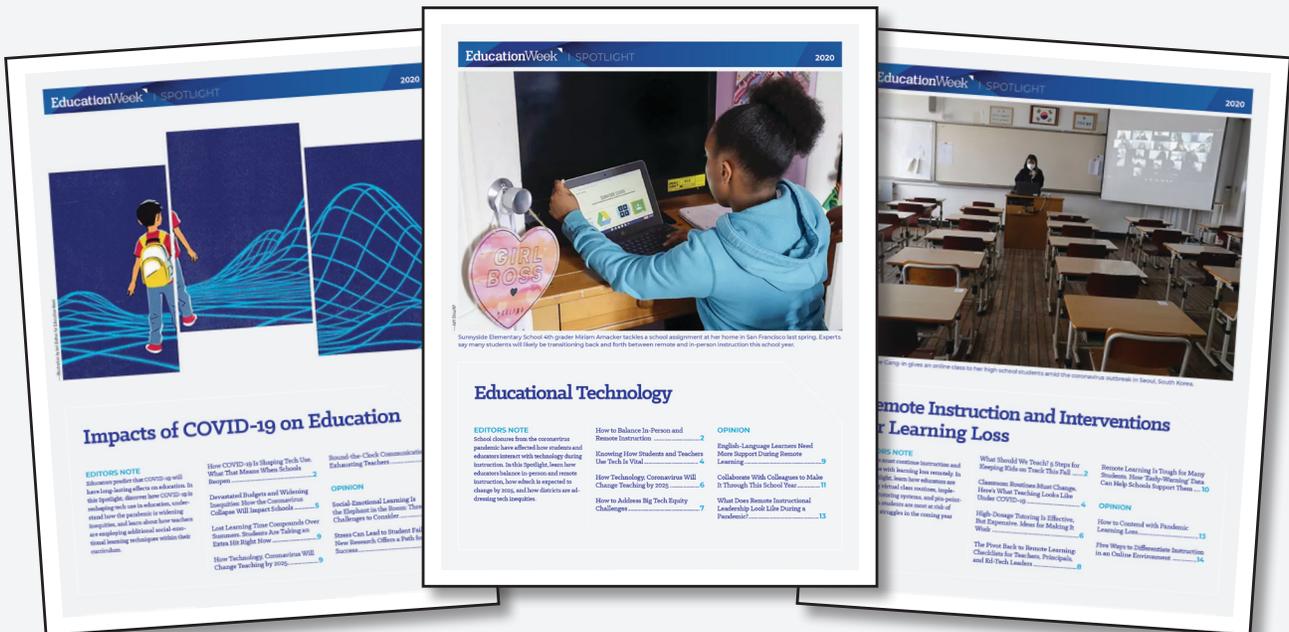
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