Transforming Professional Development for 21st Century Educators

A new six-point approach to professional development aims to increase teacher effectiveness, address achievement gaps in student performance, and create lasting success in the 21st century classroom.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Teacher effectiveness has never been a bigger challenge than in today’s 21st century classroom. Today’s educators face a number of new challenges, from implementing Common Core State Standards, to massive reform in teacher evaluation, to high-stakes state standardized testing. Now more than ever, teachers face constant pressure to be effective in their classrooms and create real results in student achievement.

But do traditional professional development programs equip today’s educators to meet these demands? New research from the Center for Public Education (CPE) says no, citing evidence that shows the traditional workshop-style model of teacher education—the most common form of professional development—is largely ineffective. Educators report that these workshops lack the adequate time and rigorous format needed to make them effective. The majority of these sessions include fewer than 14 hours of training during which teachers sit and watch a presenter describe a practice or skill. According to the report, these courses have little to no effect on teaching practices.

Pat Wasley, chief executive officer at Teaching Channel, agrees with CPE’s findings. Traditional development methods, according to the 30-year veteran educator and administrator, have outlived their usefulness.

It’s time to overhaul teacher training, states Wasley. New practices in educator development, she explains, are the first step toward boosting academic achievement and meeting national guidelines for student outcomes. “As we overhaul outdated modes of training, we will give teachers the practical tools they need to make them effective in their craft.”

In this special report sponsored by Teaching Channel, T.H.E. Journal looks at a new model of professional development designed to meet the needs of today’s educators. This six-point approach aims to provide schools and districts with a blueprint for improving their professional learning model and create real student achievement in their classrooms.

ABOUT PAT WASLEY

Pat Wasley is the Chief Executive Officer for Teaching Channel. Pat began her education career as a public school teacher in the U.S. and in Australia. She has been a public school administrator, a researcher, a university professor and a dean of both the Bank Street Graduate School of Education and the University of Washington College of Education.

Along the way, she has worked in a variety of roles to understand how to prepare and support teachers as they develop an ever-growing and sophisticated repertoire of approaches for working with children.

Pat is also the author of numerous articles and several books on school reform, including Teachers Who Lead and Stirring The Chalkdust. She is co-author of Kids and School Reform, which investigates the relationship between school change and students’ academic achievement.

She is a past board member of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and past president of the Washington Association of Colleges of Teacher Education. She was a founding partner of Educurious, an innovative curriculum development group.

In her role at Teaching Channel, she continues to collaborate with teachers across the United States and in other countries to improve conditions that enable teachers to be more successful in educating American children.
6 KEY ELEMENTS OF NEXT-GENERATION PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teaching Channel has identified six elements that are keys to an effective teacher education program. Backed by research from leading educators, these principles provide the foundation for Teams, Teaching Channel’s online professional development platform and teacher community.

1) Active learning format
2) Intensive, ongoing training
3) Relevant, needs-specific content
4) Job embedded development
5) Peer collaboration and support
6) Aligned with Common Core State Standards

Active learning format. The first step toward reforming teacher education is to move away from “Sage-on-the-Stage” approach, according to Walsey. This format, she says, is ineffective because it treats teachers as passive learners, providing next to no opportunity for participation or critical thinking.

“Sit-and-learn models don’t engage teachers,” explains Walsey. Effective training, she says, should “provide the ongoing help, collaboration, and active learning that teachers need to truly improve learning within complex 21st century classrooms.”

Teaching Channel’s multimedia platform, Teams, includes a number of features designed to support active learning. Educators can view, share, and annotate video of classroom practice, participate in discussion with peers, and generate feedback from mentors. These features, notes Walsey, enable teachers to connect theory to real-world practice.

Intensive, ongoing training. Research shows that ongoing professional development has a greater impact on teacher learning than one-off teacher workshops. Programs that include frequent, regular sessions over an extended length of time lead to improvements in teacher effectiveness and student performance. In one study, math teachers received 60 hours of training—which included a week-long summer workshop plus a series of follow-up sessions—over a six-month period. These educators reported significant improvement in student outcomes following the intensive training program.

Teaching Channel’s Teams platform is designed to support this type of rigorous teacher development. The site’s extensive library of high-quality instructional resources—including videos with annotation capability and interactive Q & A sessions—enable educators to pursue ongoing training, through a flexible platform that suits their time and priorities.

“We designed Teaching Channel Teams as an online resource because we know how hard-strapped teachers are for time,” notes Walsey. “We wanted it to work with their schedules and provide them with meaningful opportunities to learn when it works best for them.”

Relevant, needs-specific content. Professional development, like teaching, shouldn’t be “one-size-fits-all.” Every school and district has unique needs and challenges. Professional development, according to Walsey, should deliver relevant subject material that addresses these needs and improves student learning.

ABOUT TEACHING CHANNEL TEAMS

Teaching Channel Teams is a private collaboration platform that transforms professional development with customizable and relevant academic content; social sharing within safe, private networks; and collaborative communities where teachers and teacher leaders can connect, share best practices, and interact with instructional videos in a new way.

At the core of Teaching Channel is a continuously growing library of video content. Users can access more than 700 videos—177 aligned to the Common Core—of real-world, exemplar teaching practice.

With Teams, districts and education organizations can host their own video collection of best practices within the platform. This content is available only to members of that district or agency’s network.

Educators can easily share video of classroom instruction with their peers and mentors, either in a private or public group. Teachers can see how students respond and interact with the learning material, receive feedback from their peers or coaches, and adjust their practices accordingly.

The site also supports video annotation promoting intentional viewing and reflection as well as online discussion through a private, secure channel. Coaches and teachers can make notes and provide feedback as they’re viewing videos. They can also discuss the video through the platform’s group chat feature. This channel is designed to give educators a safe environment for learning and developing their expertise.

Find out more about Teaching Channel Teams and how the platform is transforming teacher learning at www.teachingchannel.org/teams.
"After 30 years as an educator, I have a deep understanding of how challenging it is to effectively meet the needs of all students," says Wasley. The site includes more than 700 videos featuring veteran educators presenting lessons on a range of subjects and teaching practices.

Job embedded development. Job embedded training connects theory to practice. Part of a long-term development cycle, these activities aim to enhance instructional practice through real-world application and peer support. A second-year language arts teacher, for instance, would work with her mentor teacher to develop and present a lesson on writing personal essays to her eighth grade students.

Teaching Channel Teams facilitates this approach by providing educators with a practical space through which they can test drive new skills and strategies and receive constructive feedback. Teachers upload video of recorded class sessions to the site then invite their peers and mentors to view and evaluate the recording. Users provide advice and direction in group discussions or one-on-one chats through the platform’s private, secure channel.

“One of the greatest problems teachers face after learning new skills is implementing them in the classroom,” explains Wasley. Teams eliminates this issue, she says, delivering a channel through which teachers can put theory into practice, right in their own classrooms.

Peer collaboration and support. Successful teacher education programs should include opportunities for collaboration. These sessions allow teachers to learn from each other as they exchange ideas and best practices and work on new strategies for driving student achievement.

When the MET Project, a research initiative that measured effective teaching methods, asked teachers for ideas on how to meet the needs of diverse learners, the majority of teachers answered, “Other teachers.” These educators reported that collaborative activities would have a major impact on their ability to successfully address different learning styles and needs.

Teaching Channels’ Teams platform is based on this insight, according to Wasley.

“For 80 years teachers have been saying that they’d like to learn from other teachers, to learn from people who are doing what they are doing, to gain and develop expertise that makes a difference in their own teaching,” she explains. “Teams connects teachers and coaches within a school, across a district or within a larger network of educators. The platform makes it easy for these educators to help each other learn and discover professional development resources that help them grow professionally—without having to take time away from their classroom or incur the expense of traveling to another school or district.”

Aligned with Common Core State Standards. Since the release of the Common Core State Standards in June 2010, schools and districts adopting the standards have made concerted efforts to modify instructional practices to teach to the new guidelines. Their challenge is not knowing how these new guidelines will influence practice. School leaders are redesigning professional learning systems to provide concrete direction and better prepare educators for full implementation.

Teams supports this effort by giving teachers real-world tools and strategies for successfully implementing the standards in their classrooms. Teachers strengthen their knowledge through rigorous activity and collaborate with peers to create content, communicate ideas, and share what they have learned in their own classrooms.

CASE IN POINT: EDUCATE TEXAS

Educate Texas, a public-private initiative of Communities Foundation of Texas, aims to improve public education throughout the state with a focus on how teaching and learning take place. Educate Texas’ college-ready network of 124 early college high schools and Texas Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics academies serve more than 50,000 students and approximately 4,500 teachers across the state. As Educate Texas’ already large network of schools continues to grow, so has its need for innovative solutions for providing professional development support to its teachers and educators.

“We were looking for a professional development solution that would allow us to provide low-cost, high-impact individualized professional development,” said Susan Henderson, program manager for Educate Texas. “When teachers are able to see themselves in the classroom, work with peer coaches, mentors, and other colleagues to reflect on their practice, this creates a unique opportunity for improving practice.”

To address this issue, Educate Texas teamed up with Teaching Channel to create a private online learning platform delivered through Teaching Channel Teams. Being able to see themselves in the classroom, working with peer coaches, mentors, and other colleagues to reflect on their practice, gives teachers a unique opportunity for improving their practice.

The portal features video of teachers within Educate Texas’ college-ready network of schools, including Cedar Hill Collegiate Academy, Alief Early College High School, and Sheldon Early College High School. The portal will launch during the 2013-2014 school year to as many as 1,000 teachers with potential to feature an additional five schools.

Teachers and coaches will also use the portal as a tool for collaboration and review. The platform allows teachers to film their classrooms, upload the videos, and receive feedback from mentors and colleagues. The platform includes a number of unique features including: annotation tools that allow coaches to make suggestions for improving teaching practice; a workspace for collecting teaching resources; and a groups feature that allows teachers to develop communities of practice online.

The new portal answers a critical need, according to Henderson. “Teaching Channel Teams enables us to reach and connect with teachers and coaches across the state,” she said, “and provide our teachers with access to the anytime, anywhere coaching and professional development they need.”
PREPARING FOR COMMON CORE

Teaching Channel Teams prepares teachers for effectively implementing the new Common Core State Standards for college and career readiness by providing them with:

- A deep understanding of standards and the key instructional shifts they require in both mathematics and English language arts and literacy.
- High-quality, instructional resources including a growing library of more than 170 standards-aligned videos.
- Meaningful opportunities for collaboration and practice.
- Helpful resources to prepare teachers and students for the assessments.

CONCLUSION

Effective instruction drives student achievement. As today’s teachers aim to improve their instructional practices and increase effectiveness in the classroom, they are actively looking for professional development systems that will support this effort.

Teaching Channel Teams offers districts and schools a flexible, robust platform designed to prepare teachers for the 21st century classroom. With anytime, anywhere access to educational resources and peer communities, Teams empowers educators to implement practice that drives student outcomes.

“I believe that Teaching Channel Teams has the power to transform the future of professional learning,” says Wasley. “We are excited about working to help create the first-ever evidence-base for professional growth in education and will continue our mission to help teachers and districts transform teaching to create substantial and sustainable gains in student performance.”

ABOUT US

Teaching Channel

Teaching Channel (Tch) is a thriving online community that is revolutionizing how K-12 teachers can learn and improve. With its best-in-class video library and award-winning website, Tch has emerged as a leading educational resource for its 370,000+ members with a specific focus on the Common Core State Standards. Our mission is to help teachers grow to improve outcomes for all students. For more information, visit Tch on the web at TeachingChannel.org, and on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest.

Find out more about how Teaching Channel Teams is transforming teacher learning at https://www.teachingchannel.org/teams

T.H.E. Journal

THE Journal is dedicated to informing and educating K-12 senior-level district and school administrators, technologists, and tech-savvy educators within districts, schools, and classrooms to improve and advance the learning process through the use of technology. Launched in 1972, THE Journal was the first magazine to cover education technology.

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