

The 10 Keys to Effective Professional Development

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[TechForum Orlando](#)

Presentation:

See the [conference bike](#) | [conference bike movie](#)

What was your most effective professional growth experience and why? [See most effective.](#)

What was your least effective professional growth experience and why? [See least effective.](#)

Key 1: Understand the purpose of professional growth.

The purpose of professional growth experiences are to:

- 1) alter professional behavior
- 2) improve student performance and learning

Setting the stage:

Does your organization have a vision statement that identifies the role of professional growth in the organization?

Does your organization have mission statements that support attainment of the vision?

Vision statement from the National Staff Development Council (NSDC): All teachers in all schools will experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work.

Our vision statement in District 99: To improve student learning by providing educators with opportunities for learning, collaboration and renewal

A vision statement identifies a future preferred state. Mission statements are identified actionable items, that when satisfied, contribute to the attainment of the vision.

Many use the terms interchangeably; I believe they are different.

Does your organization have a mantra? A mantra cuts to the essence, and describes the heart and soul of something. It should be three words, and it should be written for the employees!

The purpose of professional growth is not to train people. Here is how I do it, now you do it-that doesn't get it done. Training is what you do to dogs-it has a very Pavlovian connotation to it. Professional growth experiences are not stimulus-response activities...remove the word training from your vocabulary.

From Guy Kawasaki, and the *Art of the Start* [Video](#) | [PowerPoint slides](#)

Wendy's: Healthy Fast Food

FedEx: Peace of Mind

Apple: Think Different

Do you remember [John Belushi in Animal House](#)? What college did he attend? What was their mantra?

Knowledge is good...

Does your vision statement include *life-long learning*? Read [Scott McLeod's post at Techlearning.com](#) about schools squashing student enthusiasm-in the post, he addresses the relationship of the phrase life-long learning within a vision/mission statement to the ability of schools to actually accomplish that.

Key 2: Align professional development with school district goals.

Are professional growth experiences aligned with organizational goals? If not, they should be. Surprisingly, many school districts offer professional growth experiences that have no relationship with the direction and goals of the school district.

What determines which professional growth experience will be offered?

Should professional growth be **mandatory**, **optional**, or a **combination of both**? See [contributions](#).

Goals identify where you want to go. They are compared to where you are-the result can potentially be a *gap*-and identify the direction of your organizations professional development (see Key 3 below and the importance of data). The vision statement is a manifestation of the goals your organization has.

Do you agree with this statement? "The most effective effective professional development is determined by teachers around their own needs." Julie Coiro via Teaching Hacks.com (see the post [here](#)).

My thought: I disagree to an extent. How does that really happen-determined by teachers around their own needs? What about more global concepts, that move all in a direction as identified by district leadership, which by the way, should include teachers? Does an individual teacher have the global context for organizational growth and development? The answer to that is probably no. That's not something that should paint a negative picture about teachers, it's just reflective of their role, and the poor job most districts do identifying and supporting teacher leaders.

I agree that a professional growth opportunity determined by teachers according to their needs has a good chance to be successful-in part due to the high motivation to learn, and when thought of as informal opportunities for learning. See Key 8 below.

But back to the statement. "The most effective professional development is determined by teachers around their own needs." This probably makes sense when in the context of individual growth, but not with organizational growth. Does a school district have a need to design professional growth experiences that move *all* forward. The answer of course is yes.

I think you can have effective professional growth that does not have its genesis with teachers, as determined by teachers.

However, I also think there should be a mixed approach to defining the nature of professional development-for instance, in my district we offer Project CRISS, assessment literacy, cooperative learning, and various technology courses that support the attainment of school board goals. We also provide opportunities for individual teachers to pursue individual needs through their professional growth plans that are part of the evaluation cycle.

Here are District 99 tech standards, called the "Learner Standards for Technological Understanding." [Short Web Version](#) | [Full pdf version](#)

Key 3: Know your usership.

Users come in different flavors and have different needs. How well do you know the flavors and needs?

Suggestion: provide multiple entry points for differnt types of users with different needs.

Use [Zoomerang](#) or [SurveyMonkey](#) to gather data.

Professional development should be driven by goals and data/information about where learners are. If the majority of the learners cannot meet the goal, there is a gap. That gap is remediated through professional growth.

Where are you at?

Where do you want to go?

Are you there? Yes-good. No-time to get some adult learning going.

Key 4: Use pilot programs.

Pilot programs are absolutely critical. They help test what you are going to do, in live situations before you actually go live. In Key 10, I'll talk about evaluating organization readiness. Being ready is a result of doing a pilot first before you release the professional growth experience to the masses.

Get everything figured out. Make sure it all works. Have resources and people in place. Test and revise, and then test and revise again. *Get it right.*

Then offer it to everyone...

This is eventually evaluated in Step 3 of Key 5.

Who do you select for pilots? This is absolutely critical. I really like Malcolm Gladwell's idea of connectors and mavens here. Connectors, like the name suggests, are highly connected to others. They're people persons. Mavens are information specialists-they know stuff.

An aggressive approach is to enlist connectors in your pilot. If it falls flat on its face, well, your in trouble. *So don't let it.* A room filled with connectors in a pilot experience where the experience is well-planned and effective is a beautiful thing-you can expect a full house the next time you offer the professional growth experience. They'll tell everyone.

Also, especially with technology pilots, balance the group with people from different age groups, and different technology experience levels. Get someone who hates to use technology (and everybody knows it) and turn them. That can be really powerful.

Pilots are critical; they set the stage, and get you ready for the show.

Key 5: Invest in "peopleware."

In District 99, instructional technology is supported by Curricular Technology Consultants (CTC's) who are teachers who receive release time to support others. These teachers are technology experts and we have provided them with different kinds of opportunities to develop their technology skills.

Jay Cross: supplement self-directed learning with mentors and experts

Simply stated, successful organizations value the human resource, and seek opportunities to develop it.

Key 6: Develop space for professional learning.

Learning space is one of the most neglected aspects of adult learning? Most typically, all we ask about learning space is: "Was the room temperature OK?" and *this takes place after the fact!*

What factors would contribute to the creation of a space that would be conducive to adult learning? See contributions about [adult learning space](#).

Do you have space allocated from professional growth activities outside of the typical school environment? Do you have space allocated or identified that can be used for large scale professional growth experiences? Do you have space allocated within schools that can foster relationship-building and informal learning opportunities (see Key 8)?

Key 7: Get off site. Get new ideas.

The fact that you are at the TechForum Conference is critically important. How often do members of your organization attend events like this? And how do you extend your participation in such an event to others not attending? Shouldn't those attending maximize the dollars spent on conference attendance by sharing it with others? A great way to do this is through a blog.

But are there other ways to "get off site" if the support is not available for attending conferences? The answer to that is yes.

Be sure to check out David Warlick's [hitchhiker site](#), which aggregates blog posts about conferences worldwide. It is an outstanding way to follow a conference and learn from the people in attendance.

It's also appropriate to start thinking about getting off site for new ideas, *virtually*. Multi-user virtual environments such as Second Life are rapidly becoming a place for professional learning.

As an example, see this [page from ISTE](#), which enables users to visit ISTE's Second Life Headquarters. Second Life users can access ISTE's EduIsland, "which provides a space for educators to network and learn from each other about real-life education opportunities and best practices." EduIsland provides a space for educators to network and learn from each other about real-life education opportunities and best practices.

Expect this type of learning experience to increase.

Key 8: Encourage informal learning

[Definitions of Informal Learning](#) | Mohamed Amine Chatti

[Informal Learning: the Other 80%](#) | Jay Cross

A clear [comparison between the two types of learning](#), formal and informal | Marcia Conner

[The Power of Informal Learning](#) | Bob Mosher

[Make Space for Informal Learning](#) | Dori Digenti

From Dori Digenti: "In sum, informal learning is that which allows the tacit knowledge resident in a group to emerge and be exchanged, sometimes by serendipity, sometimes in the course of accomplishing a specific project, through the construction of spaces that support learning..."

Formal or informal?

You take a class on Photoshop at a Regional Office of Education.

You join Classroom 2.0, a learning network about the future of classrooms and learning, powered by Ning.

You are working in a computer lab and ask a colleague to show you how to add an assignment to an electronic gradebook.

You participate in a roundtable on podcasting at TechForum Orlando.

You come home from TechForum and you access this page, and read an article on informal learning.

You attend an opening keynote at the start of the school year at your school district.

You attend TechForum and then write a reflective post in your blog.

You discuss the curriculum sequence of a course you teach with colleagues, debating what and when content should be taught.

You read several blog entries on Classroom 2.0 during your lunch period.

You take an online course from a local university.

You take a college course to complete your administrative degree.

You meet with bloggers from all over the world at the Edublogger meetup at NECC in Atlanta.

You study Web 2.0 learning environments by working through this [series of online activities](#).

Some estimate that informal learning can contribute from 75 to 80 percent of the learning that takes place in an organization. If this is true, and informal learning is so important, how can informal learning be encouraged? If it is formalized, does it become

See the end of Jay Cross' paper [The Other 80%](#) to learn methodologies for encouraging informal learning

Probably the most effective informal learning occurring now involves Web 2.0 technologies, such as blogs, wikis, social bookmarking, podcasting, and RSS and aggregators.

These tools give anyone the capability to produce content-and there are a lot of smart people out there who have a great deal to say. So, it's about the conversation-a learning conversation, if you will, that you can tap into. In effect, you can build your own personal learning network and take advantage of the expertise on the Web, to learn what you need, when you need it.

Here are some of the resources I publish:

Visit my blog at [The Strength of Weak Ties](#)

Visit [Jakesonline.org](#), my Web site

View my [del.icio.us site](#)

View my [Furl site](#)

View my [Flickr site](#)

View my [public RSS subscriptions](#)

See a [visual example](#) of a personal learning network. View [Ray's Personal Learning Environment](#).

Key 9: Use Learning teams and clubs

Via Jay Cross:

To create intellectual capital it can use, a company needs to foster teamwork, communities of practice, and other social forms of learning.

Intellectual Capital by Tom Stewart

Learning teams are communities of practice that begin with a common professional growth experience. The learning experience is extended through direct classroom application of the principles and techniques taught in the original learning event. Participants of learning teams then meet, discuss their individual experiences, and learn from each other.

In my school district, learning teams are embedded within the school day and meet 5-6 times after the original event. Meetings are generally two hours in length, and a member or members of the team is responsible for developing an agenda and direction for the meeting. Generally, teachers meet on their own without the presence of an administrator. Each learning team also has a high-quality written resource that supports learning.

Learning clubs are structured almost entirely in the same manner, but they meet after school.

See the National Staff Development Council's Standards for [Learning Communities](#).

Key 10: Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate

How well does your organization evaluate its professional learning opportunities? Is evaluation relegated to a few minutes at the end of a workshop when people are anxious to leave? What exactly do you evaluate? If you consider the reason professionals engage in adult learning is to 1) change behavior and 2) improve student achievement and learning--do you measure those in your evaluations?

To be effective, professional growth evaluations must have depth and breadth. You must ask many questions, and they must be asked over a long period of time--not just a five minute window or snapshot at the end of a workshop.

Here is an evaluation system that I believe can be effective--it was developed by Dr. Thomas Guskey, from the University of Kentucky, and is discussed in his book, [Evaluating Professional Development](#):

Here are his five levels of evaluation:

- 1. Participant's Reactions:** was the coffee hot, the room temperature conducive to learning, were there handouts?
- 2. Participant Learning:** How much and what exactly did you learn?
- 3. Organizational Readiness:** was the organization ready to support the learners when they returned to their job responsibilities? You did the pilot, right. You got everything in place-if you did due diligence in a pilot experience, expect to score high here.
- 4. Participant Use of Learning:** ok, you learned something (#2), but did you use it. *Did the event change behavior?*
- 5. Student Learning:** did the professional growth experience result in increased student learning? After all, that's the point. Professional growth should improve student learning.

But how do you measure that? Learning is messy, with many factors contributing to "learning." But in this day and age, we have to try, so I'm putting learning into a simple equation:

Student Learning = Student Performance + Student Achievement

where:

student performance is measured by what students can do

student achievement is measure by how well they can do it

I readily admit that simplifying learning into an equation like above is problematic....and an oversimplification.

Can we measure what students can do. Certainly. Can we measure how well they can do it. Yes, we've been doing that for years.

So, if, after instruction, students can do something they couldn't do before (use Photostory 3, for example) and they use it to make a digital story, which for argument sakes, receives a B grade, could you say learning has occurred?

And, here is the relationship between what students learn and professional development, which is the point of this entire presentation.

If I offer a digital storytelling workshop, and you take it, and you know nothing about digital storytelling, but at the end of the session, you can use Photostory 3, and you can build a good digital story, have you learned?

Yes.

I measure that with Steps 1 and 2.

I encourage you to try it with your kids. You do. I ask you to evaluate Step 3 (remember, evaluation is not a snapshot, but it successful evaluation measures organizational readiness, which means teachers have to go back and use what they've learned).

You teach your kids how to use Photostory 3, they can demonstrate mastery of the program, and let's say they can build a pretty good digital story.

Was the professional growth experience successful? In this scenario, did the teachers' behavior change (yes, they actually used what they learned) and did it improve student learning? Yes, as measured by my equation.

Putting learning into an equation is artificial.

But we have to try measuring learning.

Resources

[Measurement ideas](#) from Doug Johnson

See the National Staff Development Council's Standards for [Evaluation](#)