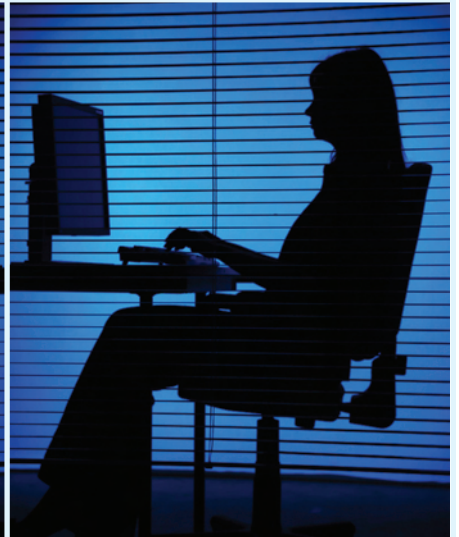


TEACHERS CLICK

WITH SHARED CONTENT AND ANYTIME ACCESS



By Lissa Pijanowski

Web 2.0 is a widely used term to describe web-based tools that rely on user input and collaboration. So what would professional learning 2.0 look like? When educators are asked to do more with less and still reach ever-rising benchmarks for student achievement, leaders must begin to think differently about how we support classroom teachers. Now is the time for professional learning driven by the use of new tools and engaging structures that provide real-time, meaningful collaboration opportunities.

Reflect on the professional learning within your school or district. Is the learning relevant to teachers? Do your teachers develop tools and resources for classroom use? Is there ongoing discussion and collaboration beyond structured

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meetings or workshops? Are there opportunities for 24/7 access to content and sharing? If the answer to any of these questions was no, then make professional learning 2.0 a priority by creating a second generation of teacher development and lesson design that facilitates content sharing, K-12 networking, teacher-centered design, and 24/7 access within a school or district.

Forsyth County Schools in Georgia is emerging as a professional learning 2.0 innovator. The district of 34,000 students and more than 2,500 teachers began the 2008-09 school year with a vision for leveraging the intellectual capital of the district’s educators while providing teachers opportunities to collaborate and create. The vision for this new structure for learning started with a learning management system that was in place for delivering courses and content to students. District leaders quickly identified the untapped potential this tool could have for professional learning. Angel Learning, the learning management system used in Forsyth County Schools (www.angellearning.com), provides an interface and components that leaders were able to customize to meet district needs. The chart at right represents the district’s professional learning 2.0 strategy and shows how technology is being used to transform educator learning.

CONTENT SHARING

The district began by designing a structure for content sharing. District staff created repositories where teachers could access high-quality content developed by teachers and aligned to standards. For example, the high school repository is organized by content area, then by course, and within each course folder teachers have access to what we call learning objects. Learning objects are documents, graphics, simulations, video, sound, and other media tools (flip charts and PowerPoint presentations) that go beyond the static textbook to engage stu-

dents in real-world content. Learning objects also include pedagogical documents — for example, curriculum maps, pacing guides, unit frameworks, and assessments. To ensure that learning objects in the repositories are high-quality, the district tapped teacher leaders to review and approve items. Participants conduct this process online through the learning management system using drop boxes and e-mail communication. Teachers use a standard protocol (SREB, 2005) to evaluate each item and give teachers feedback on their submissions (see box on p. 32). Once approved, teachers are then published and receive recognition for contributions to the learning community.

The repositories are also avenues for disseminating key learning objects for teacher professional development. Included are recorded webinars, podcasts, and informational presentations. The vision for content sharing includes the use of wikis for real-time collaboration, which accomplishes two goals. Teachers become more comfortable with the new tools through practice, and the opportunity to experience the technology in meaningful and authentic ways encourages use with students (Soloman & Schrum, 2007).

K-12 NETWORKING

Once the technical tools were in place, the district used professional learning days to introduce content sharing and engage teachers in collaboration and K-12 networking in person. With 30 schools, time to col-



Uses of technology for professional learning in Forsyth County Schools

Content sharing

- Repository of content
- Protocols for quality assurance

K-12 networking

- Time to collaborate
- Professional networking

Teacher-centered design

- Blended learning model
- Relevant product focus

24/7 access

- Community groups
- Online courses / webinars

laborate with other teachers across the district was difficult to orchestrate. Most learning was taking place within each building, and teachers were not learning from other district schools that have innovative ideas and strategies. With more than 2,500 teachers, the district created content groups and used school sites to host focused learning. For instance, there were groups at each

elementary grade level that were also divided into content areas. A 3rd-grade team from one school would have representation in the reading, math, science, social studies, and writing groups and would attend sessions with other 3rd-grade teachers from across the district. This would enable a team to return to school with new knowledge and content to share, maximizing learning for all. Middle and high school teachers were members of groups based on the content area and level they teach and also networked with teachers across all

schools. These two days were called district collaboration days; teacher leaders facilitated the learning, and all content was made available through the learning management system. As teachers networked, the district introduced the learning management system as a vehicle for content sharing and learning. Teacher leaders modeled the processes while emphasizing the relevant product focus. For teachers, time to collaborate is worthwhile if there is a resulting product. Teachers understood the impact of content sharing immediately. By the end of the first district collaboration day, there were more than 1,400 learning objects posted for teachers to use in their classrooms, available to use the next day if teachers chose to. Additionally, 86% of teachers stated they wanted district collaboration days to continue and 96% of participants would maintain contact with the teachers within their network through the learning management system or e-mail.

To maximize online collaboration, the district's vision for professional learning 2.0 includes establishing a social network within the district to develop teacher profiles and expand K-12 networking. Tools such as these will help the district foster connections among staff when face-to-face opportunities dwindle during strained economic times. Teachers already find great satisfaction using social networking tools for personal use. Why not broaden this positive experience to their professional world as well?

LEARNING OBJECTS

Documents, **graphics**, simulations, **video**, sound, **flip charts**, PowerPoint presentations, **curriculum maps**, pacing guides, **unit frameworks**, assessments, **webinars**, podcasts, **presentations**.

PROTOCOL FOR EVALUATING LEARNING OBJECTS (SREB, 2005)

Organization of knowledge. The content of the object is accurate, grammatically correct, and organized in a way that is most likely to authentically engage large numbers of learners.

Standards alignment. The object can be aligned with specific learning standards relevant to the course/subject area and promotes a clear, consistent, and shared understanding of what learners are expected to know and to be able to do.

Clear and compelling design. The production quality of the object is aesthetically pleasing and the interface and navigation are predictable and user-friendly.

Student engagement. The object can provide opportunities for engaging, interactive, and relevant instruction for learners within the learning environment.

Affirmation of performance. The object can provide opportunities for learners to receive constructive, relevant, and frequent feedback based on their activities with the object.

Novelty, variety, and reusability. The object can be used in variety of learning contexts with learners from diverse backgrounds with different interests and learning styles.

Universal accessibility. The object's design can provide opportunities to accommodate learners with sensory and/or motor disabilities.

Technical specifications. The object is free of technical errors and is compatible with the current version of the software and hardware supported by Forsyth County Schools Technology Services Department.

Intellectual property and copyright. The object addresses the rights of the copyright owner and the conditions for use.

TEACHER-CENTERED DESIGN

Teacher-centered design is a critical component of professional learning 2.0. Teachers must be valued as

professionals and have learning opportunities that challenge their thinking while filling their tool box. The barrier to implementing professional learning 2.0 was that teachers had to learn how to use the tools before they could use them for learning. Not all teachers walked into the district collaboration days knowing how to use drop boxes, discussion boards, and repositories. Much of the content, as well as the context for learning, was new and somewhat daunting at first glance. However, leaders designed a blended learning model that incorporated teacher leaders modeling the processes and use of the tools. The fact that it all happened in context of product-based learning was key.

Before they gathered, teachers were registered in an online community group within Angel for their grade level and/or content group. Teachers brought lessons, activities, and student work to share. After they discussed and shared their resources face-to-face, they began to post them in the learning management system. The number of learning objects posted in one day astounded leaders in the district. Because teachers knew they were going to walk away with immediate access to great content, they were sold on the new system. The collaboration was relevant and meaningful. Teachers were taking pictures of student work and sending text messages and e-mails to colleagues. The excitement was contagious, and the learning experience encouraged teachers to use Angel with students in their own teaching and learning.

24/7 ACCESS

District leaders found that 24/7 access was an additional benefit to using the learning management sys-

tem as the vehicle for professional learning 2.0. This strategy answered a key district-level question: How can we provide access to quality content and professional learning so that teachers can learn when they are ready and in their own time? In addition to community networking and content repositories, the learning management system offers online courses teachers can take for credit. The vision for expanding online course offerings includes creating courses that customize learning based on participants' skills and abilities — for example, an induction course that offers varied content depending on years of experience and professional background. Courses that teacher leaders have designed and delivered successfully in a face-to-face model can now be transformed for a blended or completely virtual delivery. Additionally, recorded webinars are available that archive learning as well as informational sessions, and the district plans to develop podcasts and videoconferences. District leaders and teachers continue to investigate the modalities that work best to expand access using available tools.

A CULTURE TRANSFORMED

This Georgia district has transformed from an old-school culture of “make-and-take” to offer teachers online “design-and-share” opportunities that emphasize meeting customized needs in a convenient environment. The norms of the Net Generation (Tapscott, 2009) call

Forsyth County Schools

Cumming, GA

Number of schools: **35** (19 elementary, 9 middle, 5 high schools, 1 nontraditional charter school, 1 alternative school)

Enrollment: **34,000**

Staff: **3,500**

Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	83%
Black:	2%
Hispanic:	9%
Asian/Pacific Islander:	4%
Native American:	0%
Other:	2%

Limited English proficient: **5%**

Languages spoken: **29**

Free/reduced lunch: **16.5%**

Special education: **16%**

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Classroom voice

“As Georgia began implementing new integrated math standards at the secondary level, collaboration among teachers across our district was critical.

Angel, our learning management system, fostered a learning community among math teachers and allowed us to share lessons, assessments, and ideas for instruction as they were being designed. Content sharing was key to developing our curriculum and allowed us to focus more on student learning rather than the content.

After two years of implementation, we have created almost a daily lesson plan that is shared with all teachers. Additionally, we have developed an online math support class for students struggling with the new standards. This is an additional

resource for teachers to use with students and guides students through a mastery-based learning environment that is used in a blended learning model.

Our learning management system gives us immediate feedback and data analysis on student performance that then drives our instructional planning. We are able to stop teaching to the group and start teaching to the learner. Without these tools, I am not sure that we would have made as much progress with the implementation of these new state standards.

If we were working as individual teachers, we would still be struggling. As a team of educators across the district, our professional learning has enabled us to be successful and, in turn, we have better served our students.”

— *Derrick Hershey, North Forsyth High School math teacher*

for 24/7 access. Norms for this generation include the freedom to work when and where you want and the ability to customize work and learning environment. Collaboration among colleagues is key to getting things done, resources and tools must be available and fast, and innovation is about finding new ways to accomplish work. These norms, typified in Forsyth's professional learning 2.0 strategy, translate into a learning community that meets educator needs today.

This professional learning strategy will not work without a strong partnership and shared vision between a district's curriculum/professional learning office and technology services (see box at right.)

Maximizing technology for professional learning is not about using a stand-alone technology-based tool or resource. It is about engaging teachers in real-time, product-based learning focused on providing meaningful collaboration.

“By mobilizing the collective knowledge, capability, and resources embodied within broad networks of participants, smart firms (or school districts) can accomplish great things” (Tapscott, 2009). This strategy is a vision for transforming adult learning so they are better prepared with high-quality digital content and tools to connect with students.

Clayton Christensen (2008) provides further support for professional learning 2.0 by emphasizing that the “impact that structure has on innovation lies at the root of many public schools’ innovative disabilities.” If leaders believe that professional learning impacts student achievement, then why don't we begin with innovating learning structures on behalf of teachers? The possibilities are endless.

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Collaboration for success

Crafting a professional learning 2.0 strategy requires collaboration and commitment among district support staff — professionals in curriculum, professional learning, and technology. We found success with these elements:

- 1. District staff became** knowledgeable about the tools and how to leverage them in a new way to provide professional learning opportunities.
- 2. Teacher leaders engaged** in designing the blended courses and content to share across the district.
- 3. The district team crafted** a realistic rollout plan that took into consideration engaging all teachers across the district, communicating progress on an ongoing basis, and determining benchmarks for content/course development.

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