

Tapping technology's potential:

Shrinking budgets, looming standards, and a dizzying array of innovations are changing the professional learning landscape.

By Joellen Killian

While technology can enhance professional learning, how it is used will determine the degree to which it can influence educator practice and results for students. As individuals, schools, districts, and states strive to meet the demand for professional learning generated by Common Core standards and other emerging initiatives in education, effective use of technology requires careful consideration and planning.

Creative sparks:

Innovations fuel a new vision for professional learning.

By Stephanie Hirsh

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has made a significant investment in innovative professional development, known as iPD. In this wide-ranging interview, the foundation's deputy director of education discusses what iPD looks like and how the foundation is challenging districts to rethink what it means to be an effective learning system. *Q&A with Carina Wong.*

The digital toolbox:

An introductory guide to collaboration technology.

By Anthony Armstrong

The growing acceptance of collaboration as a necessity in high-quality learning has fueled the rapid growth of online tools to better support educators. Determining which tools or services best support a specific professional learning system can be complex and frustrating. This introductory look into collaboration technology groups them into three categories: services that offer a primary purpose tool, services that offer a suite (or collection) of tools, and those that offer a comprehensive system of support specifically for professional learning.

Building better lessons:

Teachers find innovative solutions to improve their practice.

By Julia Harris

The nationwide adoption of Common Core standards has brought about a sea change in K-12 education. As teachers grapple with what that implementation looks like, they are finding innovative solutions such as LearnZillion and the Literacy Design Collaborative to help them advance their own effectiveness through professional learning and build better lessons.

Teachers without borders:

Technology's advances bring teaching and learning out of isolation.

How can schools and districts leverage technology to create effective professional learning? At Learning Forward's 2012 Annual Conference, sessions on innovative professional development highlighted the emerging work of districts, organizations, and companies focused on this issue. In these excerpts from one session, panelists discuss how their organizations used innovative strategies and the insights they gained along the way.

Virtual reality check:

Teachers use bug-in-ear coaching to practice feedback techniques with student avatars.

By Marti Elford, Richard A. Carter Jr., and Sara Aronin

Studies show the positive effects of using bug-in-ear technology to assist teachers with explicit instruction, delivery of feedback, opportunities to respond, and classroom management. Researchers at the University of Kansas added a new twist: using student avatars in a virtual classroom setting. Combining these two technologies makes a powerful professional learning experience for four secondary teachers.

features

UNDERSTANDING DATA

Capture the human side of learning:

Data makeover puts students front and center.

By Lyn Sharratt and Michael Fullan

The growth of digital power has aided and abetted the spread of accountability-driven data — Adequate Yearly Progress, test results for every child in every grade, Common Core standards, formative and summative assessments. All this information goes for naught unless educators can put faces on the data at all points on the learning continuum and know what to do to help the students behind the statistics. The authors identify and illustrate four areas for educators to focus improvement efforts: assessment, instruction, leadership, and ownership.

EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS

What research tells us:

Common characteristics of professional learning that leads to student achievement.

By Rolf K. Blank

A key issue for public school decision makers is being able to base policy and program decisions based on evidence of what works. An analysis of the characteristics of professional learning teachers received in 16 programs that led to increased student achievement found a number of common elements, including content focus, longer duration, multiple activities, hands-on teacher learning, specific learning goals, and collective teacher participation.



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Collaborative culture:

Belief in the power of relationships drives one principal's efforts to build social capital.

By Susan Scott and Deli Moussavi-Bock

Michael Politics promotes a culture of support and collective responsibility in his own school, with his partnerships, and in the wider community.

From the director:

Innovation can help us overcome persistent challenges in professional learning.

By Stephanie Hirsh

Educators who are wary of the word “innovation” can take heart in knowing that innovation can indeed tackle important issues and propel us forward.

Writing for JSD

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