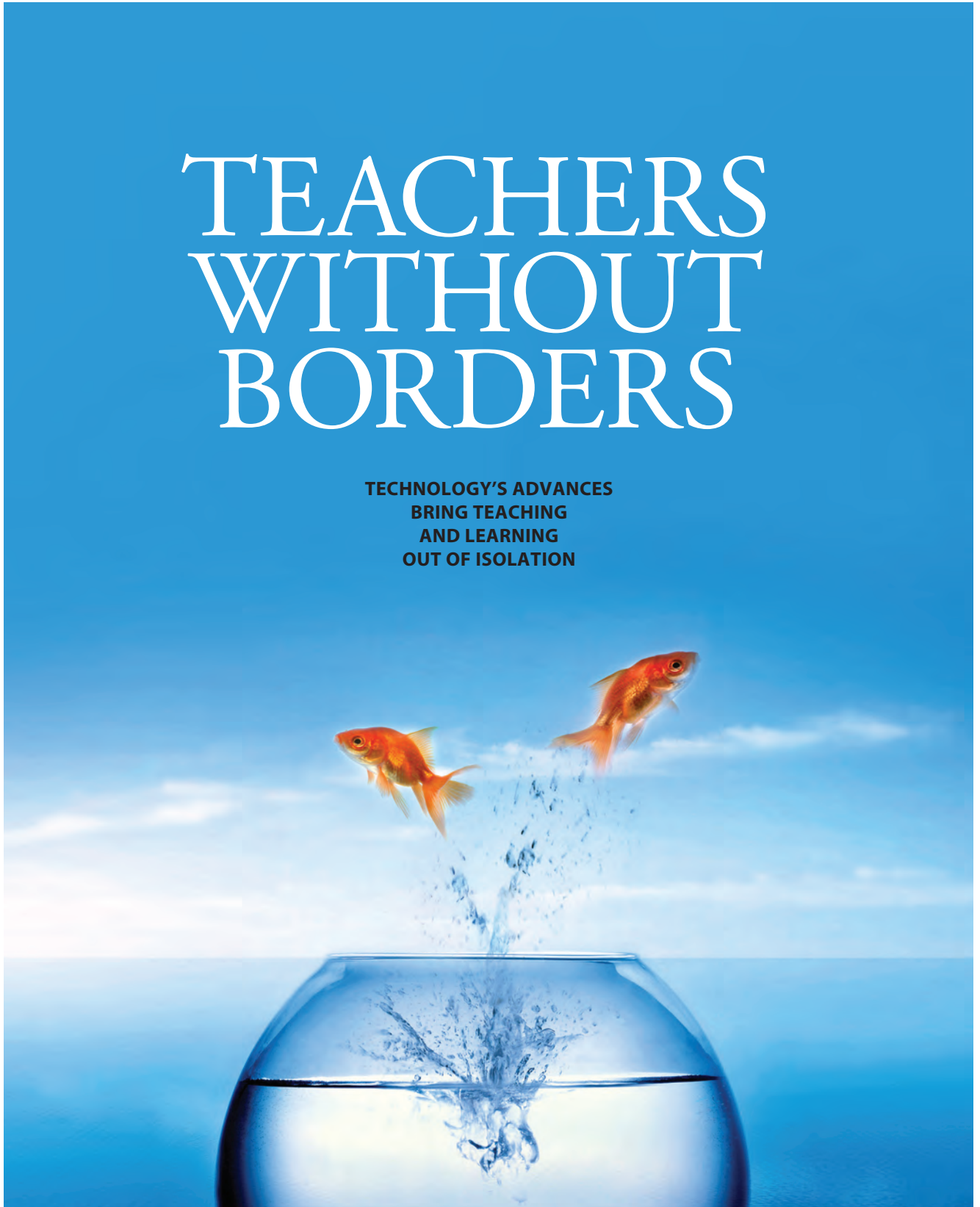


TEACHERS WITHOUT BORDERS

TECHNOLOGY'S ADVANCES
BRING TEACHING
AND LEARNING
OUT OF ISOLATION





Foggy-Paxton



Moir



Westendorf



Rooney

How can schools and districts leverage technology to create effective professional learning? At Learning Forward's 2012 Annual Conference, several sessions on innovative professional development, called iPD, highlighted the emerging work of districts, organizations, and companies focused on this issue.

Here are excerpts from a panel discussion that covered specific organizations, their innovative strategies, and insights gained along the way.

Moderating the discussion was **Andrea Foggy-Paxton**, program officer in the U.S. Program, College Ready unit at the Bill

& Melinda Gates Foundation. Panel members were:

- **Ellen Moir**, founder and chief executive officer of the New Teacher Center, who shared how her organization is moving its mentoring support of new teachers into the online environment;
- **Eric Westendorf**, co-founder of LearnZillion, who described how his organization leverages the expertise of teachers to reduce isolation and spread tested lessons to hundreds of classrooms; and
- **Joan Rooney**, vice president of instruction for MyLivePD Online Coaching Service, who explained how her service connects teachers to coaches online for personalized, one-to-one coaching sessions.

HOW DO WE LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY TO EXPAND LEARNING?

Ellen Moir: We don't want to leave the support for new teachers to chance. ... We want to step up the pace dramatically to make sure that every new teacher in America gets the support he or she needs. At the New Teacher Center, we're looking to figure out and find the secret sauce of our work, and we've now built it online.

Eric Westendorf: LearnZillion started at E.L. Haynes Public Charter School, where I was principal and chief academic officer for five years. (See "Building better lessons" on p. 32.) During that time, the school experienced dramatic gains in student learning, yet it felt like we were just scratching the surface of what was possible.

The problem was that, in every classroom, it felt like our really talented and hardworking teachers were on their own, having to figure out how to reinvent the wheel over and over again. So a group of us got together and wondered what it would mean to capture the expertise in our individual classrooms and share that with each other and also make it possible to share that with students and parents.

Overall, the idea is we want to move from a world where the teacher is reinventing the wheel in isolation to a world in which we're all working together. Japanese lesson study has a metaphor where we take something that's already strong and work together to make it even stronger. Thanks to the role of technology, we're in a place where a site like LearnZillion can raise up expertise and then invite teachers to study that expertise and contribute to it themselves.

Joan Rooney: MyLivePD is a pilot program funded by the Bill

& Melinda Gates Foundation. We offer one-to-one, online on-demand coaching for math teachers. One thing all of us know is that students learn at different times in different ways at different paces, and those same factors apply to teachers.

Maybe a teacher wants to discuss a lesson, or get some feedback on a lesson that didn't go quite as well as expected. Maybe he or she wants to discuss a plan for getting students more engaged in class, prepare for an observation that's coming up at the end of the week, or drill down on one of the eight math concepts in the Common Core.

If a teacher wants to do any of those things, he or she doesn't want to wait for the next scheduled professional development session. The learning need is *now*. Teachers don't want to sit through a workshop that is addressing issues that are not immediately relevant. They want help that's immediately actionable in their class.

HOW DO SYSTEM LEADERS SUPPORT INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES?

Moir: It's honoring and valuing teachers and walking our talk. The superintendent sets the stage for that vision. I heard the Finland minister of education say, "In Finland, we love our teachers." When superintendents in America understand that when you invest in teachers, our students succeed, then they backward map to think: If teacher and student learning is core, how should we allocate our dollars? Not how we've always allocated our dollars, but now — it's a new day.

In those districts, whether in Long Beach, Hillsborough, or Montgomery County, that's where I've seen a lot of momentum, and I've also seen really strong labor-management relationships. And,

frankly, our kids are too important. We have to line up behind improving student learning for every student.

Rooney: I'd like to broaden that question a little bit to ask: How do we allocate the resources? If you take it a little bit further, and look at the comparisons between having professional development that is face-to-face, that requires teachers to leave the classroom and to be replaced by substitutes, that requires onsite staff, and you compare that to online professional development in whatever model.

There are efficiencies and economies to that type of professional development, whether you are doing it as a support to existing professional development or as a portion of it or however the superintendent works it out. The online delivery of professional development in many ways makes it more efficient as well as more effective, and I think there's a better return on investment for the superintendent in many cases that way.

Andrea Foggy-Paxton: It's a great question. The foundation is investing in a set of districts to help them figure that out. How, over time, do you reallocate your professional development resources so you have a comprehensive set of solutions — face-to-face, online, blended learning — that addresses the needs of all your teachers?

HOW DO CONVERSATIONS SUPPORT MULTIPLE LEARNERS?

Moir: There is no point in any of us using coaches unless they're amazingly talented teachers and they've been trained to be amazingly talented teachers of teachers. You've got to have those two.

With this online environment, you have the recordings of every single conversation. When you have

coaches in your school districts or mentors out doing work, we're never in on most of those conversations and we don't know what's going on. But in an online community, we have a chance to read those transcripts, and then you can bring your coaches together online and help them accelerate their own development based on their strength as coaches and areas for growth.

Rooney: Our sessions are recorded from the moment they start to the moment they end. There are lots of benefits to doing that kind of recording. One benefit is that our mentors (every one of our coaches has a mentor) can review the session and provide feedback to the coach. It's also a benefit to the teacher. The teacher can log in and access those sessions, so the teacher can go back and review what we actually talked about, what did I promise I would do. Also that teacher can share that session with someone else. So the teacher could send it to a department head or to a colleague and say, "Why don't you take a look at this? I think this could be helpful to you" or "What do you think, and what's your input on this?"

HOW DO WE ADDRESS CONTENT NEEDS?

Westendorf: We had a situation where we put our initial set of math lessons online, and then we had a number of teachers come to us and say, "I have a significant population of Spanish-speaking students and families. Do you mind if I start translating these?" And they started to translate the lessons.

We have a whole set of teachers now who are working on creating these Spanish translations for the lessons. I'm excited about translating into many different languages, and that's the sort of

thing that technology enables. One hour of work on the translations equals potentially thousands of hours benefited in terms of other teachers getting that support.

Moir: I had an interesting example of new teachers who wanted to learn how to do a science inquiry. I wondered if we could tell by reading the transcripts if they're actually enacting an inquiry. When you read what the new teachers are saying to each other and what the mentors are saying to the new teachers, you see that the new teacher says, "I used to be so afraid. I would hardly let the students move around, I didn't want to let them get out of their seat, I didn't really want them to inquire. I wanted to stay to the script, and now I'm seeing that I can actually engage students much more by doing these kinds of inquiries, and I'm learning from Joe and Mary and whoever." You start to see this community really happening.

It's organic in a lot of ways. It's emanating from what the teachers need. It's not someone from up here saying, "Get these teachers inquiry! They all need it right now." I think we have to kind of flip it and really build off of what teachers need.

WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING?

Moir: Over the next five years, we're all going to be experimenting with innovative ways to help teachers learn. Some are going to be more effective than others, and we're going to pick them up. What I worry about is that we have a long history of doing professional development that doesn't work — not all, so don't get me wrong — and we have to be really thoughtful about this. My dream is that districts will embrace online and face-to-face professional learning

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- **New Teacher Center:** www.newteachercenter.org
- **LearnZillion:** <http://learnzillion.com>
- **MyLivePD:** www.mylivepd.com

in ways they've never seen before, in ways that, when you survey teachers, they say, "Oh, my gosh, this is the best."

Westendorf: I imagine there being a public utility of expertise, almost like electricity, where you're not going into the classroom and trying to make this up on your own. There's this spring of expertise that you can plug into that is practical, that gives you what you need when you need it, and then, from that utility, you have these communities where teachers are working together to then contribute back into that community.

Rooney: I think we cannot begin to imagine the possibilities. We think that we're kind of far down the road of online learning, and we're just at the very beginning. Online learning will increase tenfold, one hundred fold, one thousand fold. Teachers will be coming up with new ways to connect and to provide resources. They will be bringing students into that process somehow, and they will be communicating with experts, perhaps in China, perhaps in Norway.

There are possibilities of expanding communication, expanding access to resources, expanding access to real professional expertise when you need it. There are possibilities we can just barely imagine right now. All of us together are moving down that road find out what's next. It'll be exciting. ■