



Our students' needs can't be compromised because of our reluctance to learn.

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CALL TO ACTION

Frederick Brown

ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY HELP US DO MORE FOR STUDENTS

Recently I was speaking to my doctor about a minor surgical procedure I needed. During our conversation, she explained how new robotics technology would make my surgery much less painful and decrease the recovery period substantially. She admitted that when she first learned about the new technology, she was reluctant to use it because she had become so skilled in doing the surgery the “old way.” She said, “My patients didn’t complain too much, but if I’m being honest, they didn’t actually know what they were missing.”

As I reflected on that conversation, I found myself feeling thankful for two things. I am grateful that new technology is available to make my surgical experience smoother, and I am equally thankful that my doctor took the time to learn how it could improve her practice and meet her patients’ needs. I imagine she engaged in her own learning, perhaps alongside her colleagues. She likely observed others using the new technology and then

practiced it, perhaps with some type of coaching support. From what she told me, she has now developed enough comfort with the new technology that it has become standard practice for her.

In education, as in medicine, there have been many technologies that have improved lives, and many professionals have been skeptical of them at first. When I was a high school and college student, some people perceived scientific calculators as a threat. One of the biggest concerns was that students would stop learning how to do the math. When I was in college, word processors became mainstream, and there was concern that students would lose the ability to write. Later, when I was a teacher and then a principal, web browsers became common, causing some people to worry that students would lose the ability to do research and think critically.

Now, the perceived threat is artificial intelligence, and many educators and parents worry that students will use ChatGPT to write papers and do their homework. As we navigate this new reality, we should keep in mind that technological advances have occurred throughout our careers and lifetime, leading to many benefits. There are challenges, of course, but there were challenges with the old ways we did things, too.

How do we, as educators, proceed? One option is to stick to our old ways of doing things because they are comfortable for us, even when we know our stakeholders might benefit from new approaches. The other option is to be like my doctor and cautiously but openly assess how to integrate new technologies into our practice in an effort to more effectively support those we serve. We always have the choice to learn — and it’s a good choice.

LOOK TO THE STANDARDS

The Standards for Professional Learning offer guidance on how to think about many aspects of learning to improve our practice, including adaptation to new technologies. Among the many



relevant standards, the Professional Expertise standard reminds us of the importance of discipline-specific expertise — that is, the knowledge, skills, and practices essential for educators to succeed in their roles. This includes not only the *what* of content knowledge in a domain-specific area (such as math), but also the pedagogical knowledge that drives *how* we teach. Technology is often part of that equation, and more so every year, as new tools — most recently AI — work their way into education.

The Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction standard is highly relevant as well. Increasingly, curriculum materials are digital, assessments are computerized, and instruction incorporates technology tools. The standard articulates how job-embedded professional learning should incorporate the same tools that teachers will be using with students.

When I consider the importance of getting more comfortable and effective

with integrating new technology into instructional practice, I also look to the Implementation standard. The rationale for the standard states, “Educators understand that meaningful change is a complex, multifaceted process that requires sustained effort over time, and they learn how to support and encourage ongoing individual and collective change” (Learning Forward, 2022, p. 50). It’s helpful to remember that new technology, especially complex and transformative technologies like AI, take time to learn and implement. This underscores the importance of sustained, job-embedded professional learning. Single-session workshops are not an effective way to learn to integrate new technology.

STRENGTHEN YOUR EXPERTISE

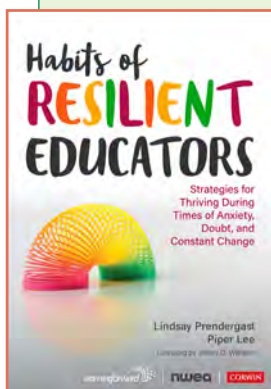
As you read this issue of *The Learning Professional*, I encourage you not only to use the Standards for Professional Learning as your guide on this journey, but to take inspiration, as I

do, from my doctor. Assess your learning needs around new technologies so you can strengthen your expertise to support students’ needs. I urge you not to let nerves or entrenched habits delay your learning and use of the new technologies.

I would have been frustrated to learn, after my surgery, that my doctor was one of the last holdouts to use new technology, choosing instead to use a procedure that was not only outdated but also created a more negative experience for patients. Let’s make sure our students don’t wind up in that situation and find out years down the road — in college or the workforce — that their educators could have done more to prepare them for successful futures. Our students’ needs can’t be compromised because of our reluctance to learn.

REFERENCE

Learning Forward. (2022). *Standards for Professional Learning.* Author. ■



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May 22 | 3-4 p.m. ET

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