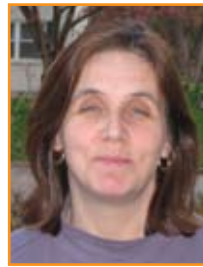


Should We Sacrifice Class Time for Professional Development?

Yes

We should definitely use class time for professional development. Technology is changing and growing all the time, and it is our job to prepare students for the world they will inherit. One hour away from a class or even a day spent on quality professional development is a worthwhile use of time. After all, it is pointless to continue an approach in the classroom if what you are doing is not preparing your students for the future. And besides, a break away from class every now and then is beneficial for all, especially if we go to year-round school.

Professional development needs to reflect the needs of both the teachers and the students. Why are we still discussing technology professional development? Isn't the real conversation about learning, teaching, and the appropriate tools to enhance this process? Learning to point and click is simple, and professional



Michelle Podulka

No

We are in the midst of an economic and budget disaster that has left us with a shortage of money to pay even for basic supplies or the salaries of the teachers who still have their jobs. We should be in crisis mode, and there should be a total suspension of staff development programs for the duration of this downturn.

As a by-product of the current situation, our political and educational leaders have shown their clear priorities in relation to education. They are not protecting education as a high-priority concern. Their rhetoric might pay lip service to the importance of education—especially when candidates are campaigning for votes—but when it comes to

putting their money and priorities in line with that rhetoric once they're in office, their resolve pales.

I have been a staff development specialist in California for 20 years, and I have witnessed the way most staff development programs are currently run: from the top down. Administrators treat



Ron Witort

development that simply shows teachers a flashy new technology is nothing more than a commercial. What teachers really need to know is how the latest research can be used within their own practices. In my experience, if you show teachers the tools and give them some examples of how they are used, as well as the time to collaborate and explore with their peers, they jump right into new ideas and are excited about employing new techniques and technologies.

It is infuriating that we are still treating teachers like our students, deciding what is best for them and then creating hoops for them to jump through. It has been my personal experience in both the public and private educational sectors that the majority of teachers are highly motivated, intelligent people who are constantly seeking ways to improve the learning process.

teachers like infants in a high chair, force feeding them the most recent “dietetic prescription” from external experts, and those teachers/consumers have little or no say about what is in the feeding jar.

What those teachers need, more than a prescription, is more classroom time to teach. They have 35–45 students in their rooms and need all the time they can get! In no way am I saying that student seat time in the classroom will guarantee that learning episodes will occur. But the research does correlate the amount of actual time on task with increased learning.

During my career, I have often heard teachers saying, “I already know more than I can teach.” I agree with them. Let’s seek to establish authentic patterns of accountability that measure real learning, not just the quantity of seat time provided or facile capacities of filling in bubbles on multiple-choice tests that will show

Professional development should be about supporting the learning process, and technology is a proven way of doing this. Therefore, all time spent doing this should be considered valuable.

Time gives teachers a chance to collaborate, reflect, and experiment. This is necessary in any profession. Would you ask a doctor if time away from his or her practice to participate in a class or discussion or to learn a new technique is a valuable use of time? Of course not; if anything, we would consider it negligent if other professionals did not keep up in their fields. And yet, for teachers there is a double standard.

If we continue to preach about the need for technology in the classroom but then hold teachers to a standard that supports only continuous testing and rote learning, then we are setting everyone up for failure. Learning should be about making meaning,

creating understanding, and solving problems. We know this. We also know that the appropriate use of technology supports this process. Professional development should be about supporting the learning process, and technology is a proven way of doing this. Therefore, all time spent doing this should be considered valuable.

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Want to weigh in on this debate?

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It is time to give the teachers and students working hard in our classrooms a chance to feel the sea change beneath them, as well as the respect, support, and protection they deserve as they go about the critical business of charting the future direction of the next generation.

only the narrowest, most rudimentary knowledge in the long path to being an educated person in our society. Let the teachers be the creative, transformational intellectuals they are hired to be, and let them decide what is in the “feeding jar” set before them.

In the current era of high-stakes testing, the No Child Left Behind Act’s mistaken accountability and scripted curricula offerings have totally emasculated both the learning environment and the teachers charged to implement it. The lock-step, one-size-fits-all conditions in U.S. schools today have wrung most of the creativity and uniqueness from both students and teachers as they march toward unrealistic adequate yearly progress benchmarks. This has not

been a case of “rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic;” it is more like putting intuitionless technicians at the helm of a world-class racing yacht.

It’s time to give the teachers and students working hard in our classrooms a chance to feel the sea change beneath them, as well as the respect, support, and protection they deserve as they go about the critical business of charting the future direction of the next generation. To do anything less is to compromise the promise they are carrying into the 21st century.

Ron Witort has been a public school teacher for 40 years and is currently a staff development specialist in K–12 curricular innovation and integration of technology, as well as a lecturer and supervisor of student teachers at California State University, Stanislaus.