

Workshop 9

The Professional Teacher

"The conferences I go to, the workshops I attend, and the professional books I read are the greatest part of my learning and...after 27 years give me the boost to keep on teaching."

—Rich Thompson, Fourth-Grade Teacher, Canyon Elementary School, Hungry Horse, Montana

Introduction

Every profession has practitioners and professionals. While practitioners may be skillful and effective at many aspects of their jobs, too often they become accustomed to their current practices and forget to reflect on what else they can do to help their students do better. Professionals, on the other hand, share an urgent need to learn and grow. As a result, they actively seek ways to improve and meet newly developing challenges in their fields.

Professional development is particularly important in education. Student populations are changing, curriculum is changing, technology is changing, and the world is changing. Yet because teachers are often isolated in their classrooms, it may be particularly difficult for them to identify sources of support and resources for growth. Professional reading, study groups, workshops, and regional and national conferences all form important aspects of the professional lives of the teachers in this workshop. In this video, they share some of those experiences and the value their professional commitments bring to their lives.

Key Points

- Professional teachers enjoy spending time with their students, and are committed to helping each one learn.
- Professional teachers spend time on their own professional development, reading books and journals, observing students, reflecting on their lessons, talking with other teachers, and attending local and national workshops and conferences.
- Students are an important resource for professional development. Observing their responses to lessons and talking with them about their learning helps teachers improve instruction.
- Taking active roles in professional organizations is another valuable form of professional development.
- Administrative support for professional development enhances teacher growth and supports student learning.
- Over-emphasis on preparing students for mandated state testing can distract educators from issues related to student learning and professional growth.
- Many teachers find collegial support groups—where they can share ideas about what they are doing in their classrooms—an important part of their professional development.
- Experimentation with new pedagogies followed by reflection on their effectiveness is an important form of professional growth. A teaching journal and video- or audiotaping are two ways to support such reflection.
- Mentors—experienced teachers—can be particularly helpful to those new to the profession.
- National conferences, in particular, expose teachers to new ideas, new possibilities, and new authors.

- Planning in envisionment-building classrooms centers on the activities students will be involved in and the kinds of thinking those activities engender.
- Planning needs to be flexible in order to respond to student needs and yet focused on the major ideas that will keep students engaged and forge the links between and among texts.

Learning Objectives

After participating in this session, you will be able to:

- Identify the professional development strategies you currently employ.
- Consider other professional development strategies that you might find beneficial.
- Support the value of finding the time and the energy for professional development.

Background Reading

In preparation for Workshop 9, read “Closing Thoughts: Literature in School and Life” in Dr. Judith Langer’s *Envisioning Literature* from the Teachers College Press, 1995.

For additional online resources, visit the *Envisioning Literature* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature, select *Engaging With Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 3–5*, and look under Additional Reading for Workshop 9.

Workshop Session (On-Site)

Getting Ready (30 minutes)

Professional development is an important part of the teaching lives of each of the participants in this workshop. In this video, you will listen as they discuss the many ways in which they find such development valuable and share different strategies they use for improving their practice. In addition, you will follow several of them as they participate in the annual November meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, as both presenters and attendees.

Site Leader: Use the questions below to spark discussion before viewing the workshop program. Participants may write answers to the questions in their workshop journals, as time permits. You may use all of the questions or select only a few. If you have Internet access, display the companion Web site to this workshop at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature, making participants aware of online resources and interactive opportunities.

Discuss:

Discuss the following questions:

- Have you attended local or national workshops or conferences? If so, what have been your experiences?
- What sometimes gets in the way of professional development? How might those challenges be met?

Reflect in Workshop Journals:

Respond to the following in your workshop journal:

- If you were unconstrained by time, money, or other external obligations, what specific kinds of professional development would you seek? How might you minimize some of those constraints?

Watch the Workshop Video (60 minutes)

Watch and Discuss:

Pause at the title card “Colleagues and Mentors.”

- What does being a “professional teacher” mean to you?
- What people or events in your career have aided your professionalism? How?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Pause at the title card “Seeking a Wider Professional Community.”

- How has your professionalism benefited from collegial input or from mentoring?
- If you have mentored a colleague, did that experience benefit you in any way?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Site Leader: If you are watching on videocassette, you may pause at the segments indicated below to give participants opportunities to discuss, reflect, and interact with the program. If needed, rewind and replay segments of the program so that viewers can thoughtfully examine all pertinent information. If you are watching a real-time broadcast, ask participants to consider the questions as they view the program, and discuss them later.

You may select any or all of the questions below to discuss, as time permits and according to the interests of your participants.

Workshop Session (On-Site), cont'd.

Pause at the title card "Self-Assessment."

- What books or journals help you participate in a professional community beyond your own building?
- What workshops or conferences have you found particularly important during your career? Why?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Pause at the title card "Planning."

- What self-assessment strategies have you tried to good effect?
- Have you ever sought student input, and if so, what were the results?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

View program until the end.

- How do you plan? Daily? Weekly? Monthly?
- What key thoughts do you keep in mind as you plan? How do you ensure that you and your students stay focused on the central issues of the curriculum in productive ways?
- How might you describe your vision of yourself as a developing professional?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

Going Further (30 minutes)

Discuss:

Divide into groups and discuss the following:

- What have been your most useful or valuable professional development experiences? What made them particularly helpful?
- Identify one or two areas in which you might benefit from professional development. How might you go about addressing these needs?

As each group shares the results of its conversation, note key points in your workshop journal.

Between Sessions (On Your Own)

Ongoing Activity

Channel-Talk:

You are encouraged to participate in an email discussion list called Channel-Talk. Send comments and questions regarding the workshop to other participants around the country. Comments can also be viewed on the Web site. Go to www.learner.org/envisioningliterature, select *Engaging With Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 3–5*, and click on Channel-Talk.

Extension: Classroom Connection

Student Activities:

Try these activities with your students.

- Experiment with some of the suggested uses from Using Sticky Notes, found in the Appendix of this guide.
- Use the Student Survey provided in the Appendix to probe student responses to classroom activities (or develop a similar survey of your own). Analyze survey responses for patterns that might help you fine-tune your instruction.
- Try “Save the Last Word for Me” (the activity demonstrated by BJ Namba and her collegial group) with your students: Ask them to identify a significant passage from their reading and write it on a card; then ask them to write the reason they chose the passage on the other side of the card. In groups, have them share their passages, and have group members discuss why they thought the passage was chosen before the reason is revealed.

Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner:

What activities have you developed for your classroom that have been especially effective for students? How might you develop a workshop or a conference presentation to share these with colleagues?

Additional Reading

- Bartoli, Jill Sunday. *Celebrating City Teachers: How To Make a Difference in Urban Schools*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001.
- Barone, Diane, ed. *The National Board Certification Handbook: Support and Stories From Teachers and Candidates*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2002.
- Birchak, Barb, Clay Connor, Kathleen Marie Crawford, Leslie Kahn, Sandy Kaser, Susan Turner, and Kathy G. Short. *Teacher Study Groups: Building Community Through Dialogue and Reflection*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1998.
- Boreen, Jean, Mary K. Johnson, Donna Niday, and Joe Potts. *Mentoring Beginning Teachers: Guiding, Reflecting, Coaching*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2000.
- Brown, Dave F. *Becoming a Successful Urban Teacher*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002.
- Burke, Jim and Carol Ann Prater. *I'll Grant You That: A Step-by-Step Guide to Finding Funds, Designing Winning Projects, and Writing Powerful Grant Proposals*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000.
- Cambourne, Brian and Jan Turbill. *Coping With Chaos*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1987.
- Christenbury, Leila. *Making the Journey: Being and Becoming a Teacher of English Language Arts*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000.
- Draper, Sharon M. *Not Quite Burned Out But Crispy Around the Edges*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001.
- Draper, Sharon M. *Teaching From the Heart: Reflections, Encouragement, and Inspiration*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000.
- Fisher, Bobbi. *The Teacher Book: Finding Personal and Professional Balance*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000.
- Fleischer, Cathy. *Teachers Organizing for Change: Making Literacy Learning Everybody's Business*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2000.
- Fraser, Jane. *Teacher to Teacher: A Guidebook for Effective Mentoring*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998.
- Freppon, Penny A. *What It Takes To Be a Teacher: The Role of Personal and Professional Development*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001.
- Graham, Peg and Sally Hudson-Ross. *Teacher/Mentor: A Dialogue for Collaborative Learning*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1998.
- Graves, Donald H. *The Energy To Teach*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001.
- Hubbard, Ruth Shagoury and Brenda Miller Power. *Living the Questions: A Guide for Teacher-Researchers*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 1999.
- Langer, Judith A. *Envisioning Literature*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1995.
- Langer, Judith A. "Excellence in Middle and High School: How Teachers Professional Lives Support Student Achievement." *American Educational Research Journal* 37 (2000): 397-439.
- Larson, Mark. *Making Conversation: Collaborating With Colleagues for Change*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997.
- Lieberman, Ann, ed. *Building a Professional Culture in Schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 1988.
- Lyons, Carol A. and Gay Su Pinnell. *Systems for Change in Literacy Education: A Guide to Professional Development*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001.
- Miller, Janet L. *Creating Spaces and Finding Voices: Teachers Collaborating for Empowerment*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990.
- Nickolic, Vesna and Hanna Cabaj. *Am I Teaching Well? Self-Evaluation Strategies for Effective Teachers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000.

Additional Reading, cont'd.

O'Reilly, Mary Rose. *Radical Presence: Teaching as Contemplative Practice*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998.

O'Reilly, Mary Rose. *The Peaceable Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993.

Robb, Laura. *Redefining Staff Development: A Collaborative Model for Teachers and Administrators*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000.

Robinson, Richard D. *Classics in Literacy Education: Historical Perspectives for Today's Teachers*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2002.

Sharp, Peggy A. *Sharing Your Good Ideas: A Workshop Facilitator's Handbook*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998.

Tremmel, Robert. *Zen and the Practice of Teaching English*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999.

Vinz, Ruth. *Composing a Teaching Life*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996.

Wilcox, Bonita L. *Thinking and Writing for Publication: A Guide for Teachers*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2002.

Wilson, David E. *Attempting Change: Teachers Moving From Writing Project to Classroom Practice*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994.

Wolfe, Denny and Joseph Antinarella. *Deciding To Lead: The English Teacher as Reformer*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997.

Professional journals about literature instruction

CELA Newsletter: The National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement, State University of New York, Albany, publishes a newsletter in the fall, winter, and spring addressing a wide range of issues concerning literacy.

The National Council of Teachers of English Journals: NCTE publishes many subscription journals including *Language Arts* for the elementary school level.

The Reading Teacher from the International Reading Association typically includes excellent articles about literature instruction as well as regular reviews of new children's literature titles.

Additional Reading, cont'd.

Authors mentioned by teachers or portrayed in this workshop program and a selection of their publications include:

Nancie Atwell

In the Middle: New Understandings About Writing, Reading, and Learning

Avi

Crispin: The Cross of Lead

The Fighting Ground

True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle

SOR Losers

Poppy

The Good Dog

T. A. Barron

The Lost Years of Merlin series

The Merlin Effect

The Ancient One

Heartlight

Tree Girl

Stephanie Harvey

Nonfiction Matters: Reading, Writing, and Research in Grades 3-8

Naomi Shibab Nye

Come With Me: Poems for a Journey

Habibi

Never in a Hurry: Essays on People and Places

19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East

Red Suitcase: Poems

Sitti's Secrets

The Words Under the Words: Selected Poems

This Same Sky: A Collection of Poems From Around the World

Kathy Gnagey Short

Literature as a Way of Knowing

Texts mentioned by teachers in this workshop program include:

Because of Winn-Dixie by Kate DiCamillo

The Breadwinner by Deborah Ellis

The Skin I'm In by Sharon Flake

The Half-a-Moon Inn by Paul Fleischman

"The Wall" by Langston Hughes

Guts by Gary Paulsen

Grand Conversations (Grades 2-6) by Ralph Peterson

Book Talk and Beyond: Children and Teachers Respond to Literature by Nancy L. Roser and Miriam G. Martinez, eds.

For additional online resources, visit the *Envisioning Literature* Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature, select *Engaging With Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 3–5*, and look under Additional Reading for Workshop 9.