PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DISCUSSION GUIDE
By Lois Brown Easton
Using this guide

This discussion guide is intended to assist Kappan readers who want to use articles in staff meetings or university classroom discussions.

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Learning 21st-century skills requires 21st-century teaching
By Anna Rosefsky Saavedra and V. Darleen Opfer

OVERVIEW OF THE ARTICLE
Students today are expected to achieve 21st-century skills, but they won’t with the transmission model of education; instead, they need a pedagogy that focuses on relevancy, teaching through the disciplines, developing thinking skills, transferring skills, metacognition, surfacing and correcting misconceptions, teamwork, technology, and creativity.

KEY POINTS

• Rote learning through a transmission model of teaching will not help young people achieve the 21st-century skills they’ll need to succeed in higher education, employment, and life.

• Although 21st-century skills have been stated in different ways, they all refer to higher-order thinking skills, deeper learning outcomes, transfer, and complex thinking and communication skills.

• The transmission model doesn’t require students to apply knowledge to new contexts, communicate it in complex ways, use it to solve problems, or become creative with it.

• Nine pedagogical approaches can help students become effective learners in the 21st century.

• One approach, relevancy, is about more than how well subjects or topics resonate with learners; relevancy is also about students understanding how a topic fits in the big picture.

• Although students should learn the “knowledge of the discipline,” they must also “learn the skills associated with the production of knowledge within the discipline.”

• They need to develop “lower- and higher-order thinking skills simultaneously.”

• Students need to be able to transfer skills and knowledge, such as working in teams or understanding cause and effect, from one circumstance to another.

• They need to be taught specifically about metacognition (how they think and learn), teamwork, use of technology, and creativity; they need to practice using these skills in the classroom and help transfer them to other situations.

• Teachers need to help students build alternative explanations to counteract their misconceptions about how the world works.

DEEPEN YOUR THINKING
Choose one or more of these individual inquiry topics for thinking and writing.

1. Which of these 21st-century skills were you helped to learn when you were a K-12 student?
   a. Critical thinking and problem solving;
   b. Collaboration and leadership;
   c. Agility and adaptability;
   d. Initiative and entrepreneurialism;
   e. Effective oral and written communication;
   f. Accessing and analyzing information; and
   g. Curiosity and imagination (Wagner, 2008).
2. To what extent did you learn in a school that featured transmission as its primary pedagogy (factual ideas transmitted through lectures and textbooks, with tests on the facts)?

3. How was learning made relevant to you as a student? How is learning made relevant in today’s schools?

4. Why do you think it is important for students to see how topics and subjects fit into a big picture?

5. How is teaching the discipline different from teaching through the discipline? Are both needed? Why?

6. How can young students engage in higher level thinking skills about a topic when they haven’t yet demonstrated mastery of the lower level thinking skills related to that topic?

7. What learning-to-learn skills such as problem solving and effective communication could students transfer from one learning experience to another?

8. In what ways are identifying assumptions and mental models important to learning?

9. Beyond learning technology for its own sake, how can technology be a valuable way to help students learn 21st-century skills?

10. To what extent was creativity fostered in you when you went to school? Given today’s emphasis on high-stakes testing, how can time be devoted to creativity?

**EXTEND YOUR THOUGHTS THROUGH ACTIVITIES FOR GROUP DISCUSSION**

Ask colleagues in your school to do an artifact hunt with you. (If you can’t actually visit the school for about an hour, engage in a “ghost tour,” during which you imagine that you’re walking around the school and collecting artifacts.) The purpose of this artifact hunt is to collect evidence that identifies how well the school is currently using the nine lessons identified by the authors. Divide your group in one of three ways:

- According to the layout of the school (one person taking the mathematics hallway and another the physical education spaces, for example).
- According to the lessons (each person taking one lesson, for example).
- According to types of evidence to be collected (what’s on the walls, for example, or what’s written in the curriculum guide).

After an hour’s work collecting artifacts (or an equal amount of time taking the “ghost” walk), have participants gather to share and analyze their collections, using the following chart (which you might put on a large sheet of chart paper and hang on the wall).

**Note:** Participants do not need to really, physically, collect artifacts, just bring a list them to the group discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Artifact collected</th>
<th>How the artifact supports or does not support the lesson</th>
<th>Evidence that would be found if the lesson were fully supported</th>
<th>The first step to improve application of the lesson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: Make It Relevant</td>
<td>Example: Bulletin board materials in math</td>
<td>Example: It supports the lesson because it shows how students used mathematics to design skateboards.</td>
<td>Example: There was no evidence that the math and skateboard design were part of a whole picture.</td>
<td>Example: Having teachers incorporate into their lesson design some schematic that shows how one topic relates to others and to the whole.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**REFERENCE**

Sharing the learning
By Jeffrey P. Carpenter and Jennifer S. Pease
Phi Delta Kappan, 94 (2), 36-41

OVERVIEW OF THE ARTICLE
When teachers share responsibility for learning with students, they help students learn better and can focus their own energy more productively on innovations that help students engage in a rich educational environment.

KEY POINTS
• Teachers work hard to help students learn, but students’ lack of effort suggests that they may feel little accountability for their own learning.
• Because students learn more when actively engaged in their own learning, teachers should shift some of their burden for learning to students.
• The authors propose three approaches that help teachers engage students in their own learning: 1) strategies that promote intellectual rigor, 2) those that foster a commitment to growth and improvement, and 3) those that develop and maintain a classroom community focused on learning.
• Several strategies promote intellectual rigor, including the idea of flipping classrooms so that homework consists of absorbing content (online or through reading prescribed material) while classroom work involves students in “individual practice, group tasks, projects, or other processing activities.”
• Another way to promote intellectual rigor is called QFT (Question Formulation Technique) in which students, rather than teachers, formulate questions to guide their learning.
• In committing to growth and improvement, students work collaboratively with their teachers to develop criteria for rubrics to be used on performance assessments and other tools for collecting and analyzing data about their own improvement.
• Teachers and students have important roles to play in developing a classroom community that supports increased rigor and student growth and learning.
• Students “own” the classroom community and the learning environment it supports by being effective leaders — perhaps even facilitating classroom discussions, helping select instructional materials, and coordinating classroom projects — collaborating to establish and maintain that community, and providing feedback to the teacher.
• The teacher’s role is not diminished when students become accountable for their own learning; in fact, they become empowered to innovate ways to scaffold student roles and responsibilities and enrich the learning environment.
• Teachers “work differently, in ways that ask and allow students to do more,” and students benefit from increased engagement in and accountability for their own learning.

DEEPEN YOUR THINKING
Choose one or more of these individual inquiry topics for thinking and writing.

1. Recall your own education. In what ways did you participate actively in learning?
2. Recall your own experiences in teaching. In what ways did you ask students to be responsible for their own learning?
3. To what extent are students “passive recipients” in the schools you know? Why do you think students may be passive rather than active about their own learning?

4. To what degree have accountability pressures forced teachers you know to take a “coverage-based, test-focused approach”? What relationship do you see between a coverage-based approach and student passivity?

5. Do you think that “students who are more active participants in their own learning will . . . develop deeper understandings about content, learn more . . . and develop habits of mind that benefit them”?

6. How do you (or teachers you know) help students “do more of the intellectual work of the classroom” in order to achieve academic rigor?

7. What is the role of homework in schools you know? Do students complete homework assignments? How is homework prepared for in one class and used the next day in class?

8. In your experience, how does testing distort learning?

9. In what ways are students you know involved in assessment of their knowledge and skills?

10. In what ways can students help cultivate the learning environment in their own classrooms?

**EXTEND YOUR THOUGHTS THROUGH ACTIVITIES FOR GROUP DISCUSSION**

Work with colleagues to modify the following classroom scenarios so they illustrate some of the authors’ premises and strategies. Specifically, consider how you might promote “intellectual rigor, a commitment to growth and improvement, and the development and maintenance of the classroom community” by having the teacher share responsibility for learning with students.

**Scenario #1**

Emily Pauling is a 3rd-grade teacher. At the beginning of the school year, she and her fellow teachers learned about the Common Core State Standards. Although she likes them, she isn’t certain how to integrate them into her classroom. Usually, she puts the standard she is teaching toward on the board in her classroom and proceeds to teach according to a plan she has devised to help students achieve that standard. At the end of a lesson or unit, she assesses how well students have met the standard and then moves to the next one. How can Emily help students become invested in the standards she wants them to meet?

**Scenario #2**

A middle school science teacher, Russell Miranda, hates tests. He believes there has to be a better way to determine whether students have mastered content. He wants students to take an advocacy role for their learning; he wants them to show him that they have learned. He’s tried science portfolios but finds them cumbersome and hard to grade. He’s tried having students demonstrate their learning, but their demonstrations take too much time. How can Russell improve assessment strategies in his classroom without resorting to typical multiple-choice testing?

**Scenario #3**

High school mathematics teacher, Chrysandra Corbett, has established a set of rules for her classroom; she introduces them at the beginning of the year, posts them prominently in the classroom, and frequently reminds students about them. Actually, one reason she frequently reminds students of them is that they frequently break or challenge them. She’s tired of spending so much time disciplining students, especially since they don’t seem willing to change their own behavior. Is there another way?

**Scenario #4**

Nielson Brankman is under tremendous pressure from his school, district, and state to produce top test scores on a new state test. At the same time, he’s suffering from budget cuts, which have increased his 6th-grade classroom from 25 students to 38. He longs to ignore his test preparation responsibilities. In fact, he is excited to try some of the innovations he’s read about in education journals and learned about at conferences. He suspects that he could use some of these innovations to simultaneously engage students in exciting learning and prepare them for tests, but he doesn’t know where or how to start. Can he take the risk of lower test scores for exciting, engaged learning? How?
Make-or-break state action
By Gene Wilhoit

*Phi Delta Kappan, 94 (2), 47-49*

**OVERVIEW OF THE ARTICLE**
Successful implementation of the Common Core State Standards requires that states support, in partnership with others, broad systemic change through professional development strategies, improvement of teacher preparation programs, provision of career pathways for expert teachers, and linked educator evaluation and support.

**KEY POINTS**

- Implementing the Common Core requires a “sea change” in the way education is delivered in states.
- States cannot directly affect what happens in classrooms, and teachers cannot address the implications of implementing the Common Core by themselves.
- Implementation of the standards requires thinking of the effort as broad systemic change, scaling up the change so that all students benefit from a focus on the standards, and partnerships across the system.
- Professional development must go beyond spreading awareness; educators must engage in organized, year-round, collaborative, professional learning communities and have professional growth plans that target the implementation of the standards.
- States should have professional growth plans that provide for interaction with principals, superintendents, and their staffs.
- Teacher preparation programs should shift focus toward the Common Core, and the faculties of the colleges of arts and sciences and education should work together to prepare new teachers.
- Teachers with content and pedagogical expertise related to the Common Core should take on the support of other teachers.
- States need evaluation systems that focus on helping districts assess teacher and principal performance and provide support as needed; these systems also should provide information on the success of professional development efforts that help teachers shift instructional strategies.
- States can’t act alone in this effort; they must partner with professional organizations and other entities.

**DEEPEN YOUR THINKING**
Choose one or more of these individual inquiry topics for thinking and writing.

1. What have been your experiences with state departments of education?
2. In your state, what influence does the state department of education have over what happens in the classroom?
3. What do you know about the Common Core? In what ways are they different from conventional standards?
4. To what extent will teachers need to change what they currently do in classrooms when they implement the Common Core?
5. How might principals’ work change in a school that is implementing the Common Core?

6. In what ways should teacher preparation programs change in order to graduate teachers ready to teach the Common Core?

7. What do you know about the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) Model Core Teaching Standards? How would they be useful in terms of graduating and licensing teachers ready to teach to the Common Core?

8. In what ways could professional learning opportunities be targeted toward the Common Core and the changes that need to occur in terms of curriculum, instruction, and assessment?

9. Does your district (or a district you know well) have a differentiated career path for highly skilled teachers? How well does it work in terms of bringing skilled teachers into leadership roles?

10. How does the teacher and leader evaluation system in your district (or a district you know well) work? How could it be modified to support implementation of the Common Core and support for those involved in implementation?

11. What approach should your state’s department of education take to help educators implement the Common Core? How could you (or have you) communicate this to the staff there?

EXTEND YOUR THOUGHTS THROUGH ACTIVITIES FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use the following variation on the Peeling the Onion protocol to discuss this article with colleagues (Easton, 2009). This protocol originated with the National School Reform Faculty and is useful when someone is tackling a challenging or complex issue.

The presenter is someone who would like to bring the issue to the table but doesn’t necessarily need to be the one who HAS the issue. In this variation, the presenter uses the article as the basis of what to share, adding anything else that is available (history, definitions, context, outside information). The presenter also shares one or two key questions that focus the issue (see step two) and reflects on what the rest of the group says. More than one person — a pair or group — may function as the presenter.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: Presenter and facilitator plus four to 10 participants

TIME REQUIRED: About 55 minutes

STEPS (with approximate timing for a 55-minute protocol)

**Step One: Introductions and orientation (about 5 minutes)**

- If people don’t know each other, be sure they introduce themselves.
- Duplicate a copy of this protocol and share it with participants, going through the steps and noting the time.
- Make sure people have read Wilhoit’s article.

**Step Two: Description of the issue (about 10 minutes)**

- The presenter should describe the issue as fully as possible, based on the article and any additional information, while participants take notes.
- The presenter asks the following key questions, which the participants write down:

  **Key Question #1:** What are the most likely barriers to implementing the Common Core State Standards statewide, and what can be done by any and all players in the education system to address them?

  **Key Question #2:** What is the optimum role of the state in terms of implementing the Common Core?
Step Three: Writing (about 3 minutes)

- The participants and presenter free-write on the issue and the key questions.

Step Four: Round #1 (about 10 minutes)

- The presenter then withdraws from the group, sitting so that the dialogue of the participants can be heard (and so the presenter can take notes) but in a way that prevents eye contact.

The participants take on the issue, making it “their own,” wrestling with it, as the presenter listens in.

- The facilitator selects one of the questions/comment starters below for this round. The comment starters invite the participants into general dialogue about the article. The presenter is silent and takes notes.

  Possible comment starters:
  1. “What I heard is …”
  2. “One assumption that seems to be part of the problem/dilemma is…” OR, “One thing I assume to be true about this problem is …”
  3. “A question this raises for me is…”
  4. “Further questions this raises for me are…”
  5. “What if…?” Or, “Have we thought about…?” Or, “I wonder…?”

- Participants respond to the starter, but not in round-robin style. Instead, they conduct a dialogue on what one participant said in response to the starter before going on to what someone else says. They may concur, differ, offer comments, ask questions, suggest examples, or provide details.

- After some general dialogue about the article, the facilitator directs the dialogue more specifically toward Key Question #1.

Step Five: Round #2 (about 10 minutes)

- The facilitator presents another starter and asks participants to begin their dialogue accordingly. The presenter is silent and takes notes.

- After some general dialogue about the article, the facilitator directs the dialogue more specifically toward Key Question #2.

Note: The rounds can continue with different starters and a focus on either of the key questions (or other questions that arise) as long as there is time.

Step Six: Presenter reflection (about 10 minutes)

- The presenter reflects aloud about what was heard, not in a defensive way but in a thoughtful way, trying to build on ideas that were generated.

- Participants are silent, taking notes.

Step Seven: Debriefing (about 5 minutes)

- The whole group debriefs both on the content and the process of the protocol and continues open discussion.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

This is called Peeling the Onion because the process is rather like peeling an onion — getting deeper into an issue or problem with each starter or layer of the onion. It is hard to know exactly which starter should be used first, but
the first one works well since it asks people to reframe what they heard before going on to deep discussion of what they heard.

This protocol is not about solving the problem or resolving an issue. It is oriented toward deeper understanding of the problem or issue, which can, in turn, illuminate good solutions and resolutions.

**TIPS FOR THE FACILITATOR**

The facilitator does not need to choose the best starter; instead, the facilitator can ask participants to select the starter. However, very little time should be spent choosing the starter — in order to reserve plenty of time for the dialogue that ensues.

People naturally, want to jump to solutions or resolutions, so this is something the facilitator should prevent, reminding them that a solution or resolution is not the outcome of the protocol — clarity and insight are.

The presenter may feel defensive, as if the ideas from the article must be defended. However, the group should realize that the presenter is just giving voice to the opinions raised in the article and should be extremely careful not to talk about the presenter as if this person holds those opinions.

**REFERENCE**

**BackTalk: The fullness of silence in the classroom**

By Katherine Schultz

*Phi Delta Kappan, 94 (2), 80*

**OVERVIEW OF THE ARTICLE**

When silence is considered a form of participation, teachers who pay attention to silence in their classrooms can use it to understand individual students and classroom culture and improve learning for all students.

**KEY POINTS**

- Silence is paradoxical; it may indicate engagement or disengagement, deep respect or disrespect, resistance or agreement, anger or joy.
- Although silences are “most often chosen by students,” often in response to a classroom situation, teachers may consciously use silence as they teach, providing reflection, inviting students to speak, or controlling students.
- Considering “silence as a form of participation” allows teachers to understand when and why a classroom is silent, which students are silent, when and why.
- Teachers can also use silence to engage students.
- Silence by itself does not indicate participation or disengagement.
- Examining silence “will lead to more equitable classrooms that hold the possibility of honoring the contributions of all students.”

**DEEPEN YOUR THINKING**

Choose one or more of these individual inquiry topics for thinking and writing.

1. How would you characterize yourself as a student? How silent or talkative were you? How did your teachers construe your silence?
2. How do adults typically react when other adults are silent? How do adults typically react when young people are silent? How do teachers typically react when their students are silent?
3. What classroom structures and dynamics might cause students to choose silence?
4. To what extent do you see silence as a form of participation?
5. How could a teacher's understanding of silence result in a more equitable classroom?
EXTEND YOUR THOUGHTS THROUGH ACTIVITIES FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

With colleagues, consider the following quotes about silence, especially as they relate to silence in classrooms.

In human intercourse, the tragedy begins, not when there is misunderstanding about words, but when silence is not understood.
— Henry David Thoreau

In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.
— Martin Luther King

As we must account for every idle word, so must we account for every idle silence.
— Benjamin Franklin

Silence is golden when you can’t think of a good answer.
— Mohammad Ali

The most profound statements are often said in silence.
— Lynn Johnston

I wash my hands of those who imagine chattering to be knowledge, silence to be ignorance, and affection to be art.
— Khalil Gibran

He who does not understand your silence will probably not understand your words.
— Elbert Hubbard
Applications

This Professional Development Guide was created with the characteristics of adult learners in mind (Tallerico, 2005):

• Active engagement
• Integration of experience
• Choice and self-direction

• Relevance to current challenges
• Learning style variation

As you think about sharing this article with other adults, how could you fulfill the adult learning needs above?

This Professional Development Guide was created so that readers could apply what they have learned to work in classrooms (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001):

• Identifying Similarities and Differences
• Reinforcing Effort and Providing Recognition
• Nonlinguistic Representations
• Setting Objectives and Providing Feedback
• Cues, Questions, and Advance Organizers

• Summarizing and Note-Taking
• Homework and Practice
• Cooperative Learning
• Generating and Testing Hypotheses

As you think about sharing this article with classroom teachers, how could you use these strategies with them?

References


About the Author

Lois Brown Easton is a consultant, coach, and author with a particular interest in learning designs — for adults and for students. She retired as director of professional development at Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center, Estes Park, Colo. From 1992 to 1994, she was director of Re:Learning Systems at the Education Commission of the States (ECS). Re:Learning was a partnership between the Coalition of Essential Schools and ECS. Before that, she served in the Arizona Department of Education in a variety of positions: English/language arts coordinator, director of curriculum and instruction, and director of curriculum and assessment planning.

A middle school English teacher for 15 years, Easton earned her Ph.D. at the University of Arizona. Easton has been a frequent presenter at conferences and a contributor to educational journals.

She was editor and contributor to Powerful Designs for Professional Learning (NSDC, 2004 & 2008). Her other books include:

• The Other Side of Curriculum: Lessons From Learners (Heinemann, 2002);
• Engaging the Disengaged: How Schools Can Help Struggling Students Succeed in (Corwin, 2008);
• Protocols for Professional Learning (ASCD, 2009); and
• Professional Learning Communities by Design: Putting the Learning Back Into PLCs (Learning Forward and Corwin, 2011).

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