



TEACHER LEARNING GUIDING PRINCIPLES

RESEARCH SUMMARY

To ensure that students experience equitable and rigorous learning, teachers are required to think about their instruction and students in new ways. To realize this vision of equitable education, teachers must develop new knowledge of their content, student reasoning, curriculum and how to adapt it to their students and their cultural contexts. Despite these challenges, a recent report by scholars Heather Hill, John Papay, and Nathaniel Schwartz, [Dispelling the Myths: What the Research Says about Teacher Professional Learning \(2022\)](#), affirms that well-designed professional learning can improve teachers' knowledge and practice, fueling improvement at scale. The Center for Educational Leadership's *Teacher Learning Guiding Principles* envisions teacher learning as a catalyst for system-wide transformation.

The *Teacher Learning Guiding Principles* outlines supportive conditions for teachers to collectively examine their practices and develop new understandings of student learning. This research summary synthesizes current research literature about conditions that foster rich teacher learning to transform student learning opportunities, and it highlights how this literature connects to the *Teacher Learning Guiding Principles*. The conditions described in this framework implicate leaders as well as teachers, and this summary concludes with a short overview of research about leadership actions that promote teacher learning.

Envisioning High-Quality Teacher Learning

A robust collection of studies describes professional learning that pushes teachers' instructional practices. For more than two decades, researchers and practitioners have characterized effective professional

learning as ongoing, embedded in teachers' daily work, active and collaborative, coherent and focused on content. Newer studies build on these foundations and emphasize that effective teacher learning depends on the quality of teachers' participation and their intellectual engagement as learners, rather than

implementation of any particular content or format. Based on her review of teacher learning research, Mary M. Kennedy (2016) argues, “We need to replace our current conception of ‘good’ PD as comprising a collection of particular design features with a conception that is based on more nuanced understanding of what teachers do, what motivates them, and how they learn and grow,” (974).

The *Teacher Learning Guiding Principles* aligns with current research that describes conditions supporting teacher motivation, learning and growth in service of transformed classroom practice. This section outlines three conditions emphasized by current literature: quality of teachers’ interactions, shared vision of instruction and processes and tasks that structure teachers’ collaboration.

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Studies identify the quality of teachers’ interactions as a critical aspect of high-quality learning, regardless of the type or design of professional development that teachers engage in. In ideal conditions, teachers approach their peer relationships with expectations of mutual support and collaboration. Research highlights the potential for learning when teachers share authority and draw on expertise from each member of the learning community. While

trusting relationships facilitate teacher learning, studies caution that teachers must also maintain a curious, critical stance and an open exchange of ideas. This research aligns with the descriptions and indicators found under Collaboration within the Adult Learning Culture dimension of the *Teacher Learning Guiding Principles*. Scholar Andy Hargreaves (2019) describes the ideal quality of teacher engagement as collaborative professionalism and suggests that conversations of this type can be both respectful and demanding, pressing teachers for deeper understanding while simultaneously building their sense of community and shared purpose. The Adult Learning Culture dimension also incorporates findings from research that emphasize the importance of teachers’ holding each other accountable for contributing to the group’s learning. Teachers’ desire to improve their practice drives their collaboration, more so than external mandates or administrators’ evaluations. As described in the *Teacher Learning Guiding Principles*, studies suggest that rich teacher learning is characterized by conversations in which teachers take on complex problems and consider substantive pedagogical solutions, rather than superficial application of “tips and tricks.”

“Research suggests that cultivating a shared vision of high-quality instruction is fundamental to shifting teachers’ practices.”

Within teacher learning communities, research suggests that cultivating a shared vision of high-quality instruction is fundamental to shifting teachers’ practices.

As articulated in the Visions and Beliefs dimension of the *Teacher Learning Guiding Principles*, high-quality teacher learning opportunities prompt teachers to question the common conception of teaching as a technical process that develops individual learners' skills. Instead, professional learning should support teachers to reimagine their work as creating opportunities for students to grapple with ideas in social settings. Studies show that teachers develop sophisticated instructional visions through discussions that focus on evidence of student thinking, surface assumptions about students' capabilities and the nature of learning and investigate interactions between teachers and students within the complex social, cultural and political spaces of their own classrooms. In their review of teacher learning literature, Lefstein and colleagues (2020) found that collegial discussions support teachers' beliefs in their own efficacy when teachers take an asset-based view of students and approach classroom problems as actionable. The *Teacher Learning Guiding Principles* highlights the importance of discussions that help teachers deepen and calibrate their understanding of what it might take to support students with equitable and rigorous learning opportunities.

Research also suggests the quality of teacher learning is shaped by how teachers structure their collaboration and the type of tasks they undertake. There is strong evidence that teachers learn and improve when they systematically examine and discuss their own teaching practices. The Systems and Routines dimension of the

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Teacher Learning Guiding Principles describes protocols, processes and collaborative structures that create impactful professional learning opportunities for teachers. For example, Ghouseini, Kavanagh, Dutro, and Kazemi (2021) describe a promising approach in which teachers co-design lessons and voice their in-the-moment instructional choices while enacting the lessons with their colleagues in the classroom. By narrating their thinking and making decisions collectively, teachers learn how to consider relevant information about students and support each other to address particular challenges to meet their instructional goals. Undertaking collaborative work such as peer observations or student artifact analysis also allows teachers to ground their discussions in multiple forms of evidence that demonstrate student thinking and teacher impact. The Adult Learning Culture dimension suggests that teacher teams examine disaggregated data to facilitate collaborative problem-solving around focal student groups. Research also emphasizes the importance of cyclic learning processes that build explicit connections between teachers' beliefs in their own efficacy, improvements to their teaching practices and outcomes for their students. These processes can advance teachers' equity goals by surfacing the social and cultural aspects of their work and clarifying how their practices reproduce, disrupt or transform the power dynamics that mediate students' experiences in their classrooms.

For further information about envisioning high-quality teacher learning opportunities, we suggest the following resources:

Datnow, A., & Park, V. (2018). [Professional Collaboration With Purpose: Teacher Learning Towards Equitable and Excellent Schools](#) (1st ed.). Routledge.

Ghousseini, H., Kavanagh, S. S., Dutro, E., & Kazemi, E. (2021). [The Fourth Wall of Professional Learning and Cultures of Collaboration](#). *Educational Researcher*, 51(3).

Hargreaves, A. (2019). [Teacher collaboration: 30 years of research on its nature, forms, limitations and effects](#). *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 25(5), 603–621.

Katz, S., & Donohoo, J. (2022). [How to achieve collective efficacy in a time of division](#). *The Learning Professional*, 43(1), 20-23.

Kennedy, M. M. (2016). [How Does Professional Development Improve Teaching?](#) *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 945–980.

Lefstein, A., Vedder-Weiss, D., & Segal, A. (2020). [Relocating Research on Teacher Learning: Toward Pedagogically Productive Talk](#). *Educational Researcher*, 49(5), 360–368.

Lieberman, A., & Miller, L. (2016). [Learning communities: Harness the energy of collaboration](#). *The Learning Professional*, 37(1), 14.

Sutton, P.S. & Shouse, A.W. (2016). [Building a culture of collaboration in schools](#). *Phi Delta Kappan*, 97 (7), 69-73.

Leading for Teacher Learning

The *Teacher Learning Guiding Principles* supports leaders to develop a vision for high-quality teacher learning. Leaders should ask what they can do to foster these conditions for teacher learning in their own contexts. While these leadership moves are not explicitly outlined in the *Teacher Learning Guiding Principles*, research suggests that leaders support teacher learning by influencing the organizational environment and by honing their own facilitation skills.

First, studies highlight the organizational policies and routines that leaders leverage to support high-quality teacher learning. Scholar Sarah Wolfin (2021) explains that teacher learning happens within an ecosystem, and argues that leaders can improve teacher learning by considering multiple components, including the alignment of resources, sponsorship of coaches, communication of participants' roles and responsibilities and celebration of learning. Other studies suggest that leaders promote teacher learning by creating coherence between the different

components of the ecosystem. For example, principals and coaches can align professional learning and evaluation processes to coordinate teacher learning goals across classroom visits and collaboration meetings.

“Studies affirm the importance of leaders learning alongside teachers by participating in analysis of student work or classroom video, engaging in lesson studies, co-teaching or modeling new instructional practices.”

Additional research explores leadership facilitation that nurtures deep discussion and the collective inquiry into student learning required for high-quality teacher learning. Studies affirm the importance of leaders learning alongside teachers by participating in analysis of student work or classroom video, engaging in lesson studies, co-teaching or modeling new instructional practices. Thoughtful leaders can disrupt unproductive patterns of teacher talk and direct focus toward learning about students’ ideas and creating rigorous and equitable learning opportunities. Leaders can facilitate productive conversations by prompting teachers to explain and provide evidence, maintaining an instructional focus and monitoring participation. Discussion can be an opportunity for leaders to establish a shared understanding of the group’s equity goals and to emphasize the value of participants’ expertise and experiences.

For further information about leading for teacher learning, we suggest the following resources:

Gibbons, L. K., Wilhelm, A. G., & Cobb, P. (2019). [Coordinating Leadership Supports for Teachers’ Instructional Improvement](#). *Journal of School Leadership*, 29(3), 248–268.

Gibbons, L. K., Lewis, R. M., Nieman, H., & Resnick, A. F. (2021). [Conceptualizing the work of facilitating practice-embedded teacher learning](#). *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 101, 103304.

Hazi, H. (2020). [On Instructional Improvement: A Modest Essay](#). *Journal of Educational Supervision*, 3(3), 90–103.

Panero, N. S. (2021). [Shifting Team Culture: An Analysis of Effective Facilitator Moves in Inquiry-Based Reform](#). *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 00(00), 1–13.

Park, V. (2018). [Leading Data Conversation Moves: Toward Data-Informed Leadership for Equity and Learning](#). *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 54(4), 617–647.

Poekert, P. E., Swaffield, S., Demir, E. K., & A. Wright, S. (2020). [Leadership for professional learning towards educational equity: a systematic literature review](#). *Professional Development in Education*, 46(4), 541–562.

Tredway, L., Simon, K., & Militello, M. (2021). Nested coaching links learning from coach to leader to teacher. *The Learning Professional*, (April 1), 52.

Woulfin, S. L. (2021). Leaders play key roles in the professional learning ecosystem. *The Learning Professional*, (October 1), 64.

Woulfin, S. L., & Rigby, J. G. (2017). [Coaching for Coherence: How Instructional Coaches Lead Change in the Evaluation Era](#). *Educational Researcher*, 46(6), 323–328.