Transforming Teacher Practice:
The Case for Curriculum as Professional Learning

Developing teacher expertise is intellectually demanding, professional work—it takes study, practice, time, reflection, collaboration, and feedback—and it requires copious resources from schools and districts. For professional learning to be relevant and meaningful, it needs to be connected to the day-to-day work of teachers. Wiener and Pimentel (2017) state that curricula have a profound effect on classroom practices, student engagement, and academic learning. They further assert that "when average teachers use excellent materials, student learning results improve significantly." It follows that a high-quality, evidence-based, rigorous curriculum can be an effective tool for scaling and sustaining improvements in teacher practice and student learning.

Remillard (2016) described the "teacher-curriculum partnership" as being at its best when the capabilities of both teachers and curriculum developers are "recognized and leveraged in support of student learning." Curriculum developers can support teachers' instructional decision-making by "placing teachers at the center of curriculum construction and making teachers' learning central to efforts to improve education" (Ball & Cohen 1996). For example, curriculum developers might communicate with teachers through the curriculum, by providing notes about the rationale for lesson design, offering insight about key content, or indicating where students might struggle (Davis & Krajcik 2005; Remillard 2016). As such, providing a curriculum intentionally designed with embedded professional learning not only helps teachers develop expertise in content and pedagogy, but also assists them with making decisions on behalf of their students in the context of daily instruction.

Center for the Collaborative Classroom is a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to developing curricula that support the academic, ethical, and social development of children and providing continuous professional learning for teachers.

Our programs help children appreciate the ideas and opinions of others, learn to agree and disagree respectfully, think critically about big ideas, and become responsible citizens of the world.

Our professional learning honors all teachers and empowers them to create the conditions for learning that support students with meeting rigorous state standards and also nurtures the needs of the whole child.

Collaborative Classroom's Collaborative Literacy improves teacher practice through intentionally designed curricula that encourage teachers to learn and practice as they teach. Collaborative Literacy lessons provide teachers with the opportunity to internalize best practices in literacy instruction and prompt teachers to think more deeply about teaching, learning, and literacy development. Collaborative Literacy curricula include features that researchers have dentified as effective in initiating and sustaining refinements in teaching practice.

To learn more about Collaborative Literacy, a yearlong K–6 comprehensive ELA curriculum, visit **collaborativeclassroom.org**.

[1] Ross Wiener and Susan Pimentel, Practice What You Teach: Connecting Curriculum and Professional Learning in Schools. (Washington, DC: Aspen Institute, 2017), 4.
[2] Janine T. Remillard, "How to Partner with Your Curriculum." Educational Leadership 74, no. 2 (October 2016): 34–38.

For a full bibliography, visit **collaborativeclassroom.org/resources/**.

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Bibliography

*Ball, D. L., & Cohen, D. K. (1996). **Reform by the book: What is- or might be- the role of curriculum materials in teacher learning and instructional reform?** *Educational Researcher*, 25 (9), 6–8.

This paper outlines the potential for curriculum materials to serve as agents of change for instructional improvement. The authors identify setbacks in this approach and offer key characteristics that they deem necessary in order for curriculum to be effective for this purpose.

*Weiner, R. and Pimentel, S. (2017). **Practice what you teach: Connecting curriculum and professional learning in schools. Washington, D.C.: Aspen Institute.**

This paper describes the impact of the curriculum as a vehicle for professional learning for teachers and advanced learning for students. It includes a research basis for the presented argument, offers three cases of curriculum as professional learning in action, and includes recommendations for leaders in education.

* These resources are referenced on page 1 of "Transforming Teacher Practice: The Case for Curriculum as Professional Learning."

Charalambos, Y., & Hill, H. C. (2012). **Teacher knowledge, curriculum materials, and quality of instruction: Unpacking a complex relationship.** *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 44(4), 443–466.

This paper presents multiple case studies that examine the complex interweaving between teacher knowledge, quality curriculum materials, and student learning. While the authors focus specifically on teachers of mathematics, parallels can be drawn to teachers of other content areas.

Davis, E. A., Palinscar, A. S., Arias, A. M., Bismack, A. S., Marulis, L., & Iwashyna, S. (2014). **Designing educative curriculum materials: A theoretically and empirically driven process.** *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(1), 24–52.

The authors of this paper present a design process for incorporating educative elements that are specifically designed to promote teacher learning in existing, reform-based curriculum materials. While the examples provided in this paper are related to science education, the authors assert that the principles and methods presented can be applied across content areas.

Davis, E. A., & Krajcik, J. (2005). **Designing educative curriculum materials to promote teacher learning.** *Educational Researcher, 34*(3), 3-14.

This paper presents a set of design heuristics for curriculum materials that are intended not only for student learning, but to advance teacher practice. The authors focus on the key areas of subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge for topics taught. They further explore the challenge of educative curriculum materials, specifically focusing on the issues of providing guidance and teacher choice in curriculum delivery.

Garet, M. S., Porter, A. C., Desimone, L., Birman, B. F., & Kwang, S. Y. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal, 38*(4), 915–945.

This paper presents a study that provided the first large-scale empirical comparison of effects of different characteristics of professional learning on teacher growth. The authors highlight three key characteristics of effective professional learning: 1) focus on content knowledge, 2) opportunities for active learning, and 3) coherence with other learning activities.

Mizell, H. (2010). Why professional development matters. Oxford, OH. Learning Forward.

This paper presents the fundamentals of professional learning in addition to examining common challenges and setbacks. The need for professional development is emphasized, in addition to offering recommendations around effective professional learning practices.

Remillard, J. (2016). How to Partner with Your Curriculum. *Educational Leadership*, 74(2), 34–38.

This article addresses the misconception that "good teachers" do not use programs or prepackaged curriculum materials. It outlines the process in which many curriculum developers use to create materials and presents a rationale for partnering with the materials—encouraging teachers to use them as a foundation to build on while using their own expertise to make the learning engaging and relevant.

Schneider, R. M., & Krajcik, J. (2002). Supporting science teacher learning: The role of educative curriculum materials. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 13(3), 221–245.

This study shares the characteristics and outcomes of a science curriculum that was developed to promote teacher learning toward reform-based science teaching methods. The educative curriculum developed and studied in this paper focuses on inquiry and student-centered teaching methods.

Schuchardt, A. M., Tekkumru-Kisa, M., Schunn, C.D., Stein, M. K., & Reynolds, B. (2017). How much professional development is needed with educative curriculum materials? It depends on the intended student learning outcomes. *Science Education, 101*(6), 1015–1033.

This paper presents a study that examined the impact of professional development paired with educative curriculum materials on student learning and achievement. The authors found that face-to-face professional development was necessary, even when paired with educative curriculum materials, in order for students to be successful with more advanced learning concepts.

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