

What technology can help educators in their professional development and also help them to become contributors to their colleagues' PD (professional development)?

Description

Latin proverb says, "By learning, you will teach; by teaching, you will learn." Being a teacher means you become a lifelong learner. Educators should continue to learn and take advantage of opportunities for professional development (PD) and understand its benefit. PD can assist them in meeting their ongoing educational requirements, enhancing and refining their teaching techniques, acquiring new tools and skill sets, and improving their learning and teaching, ultimately resulting in improving student learning and growth. The goal of professional development is more than expanding your knowledge or getting up-to-date information but promoting and preparing students for success in the real world (Hunzicker, 2011). Overall, through professional development, educators renew existing skills and keep up with ever-changing educational needs, including changes in how teaching is delivered and the skills students need for the real world.

School districts offer periodic conferences and training. There are certification programs like digital badges offered by school districts. They can provide a way for teachers to demonstrate competency in a given skill area, and digital badges easily store and keep a history of teacher PD completed learning in metadata (University of Buffalo website). There are many advantages to certifications and digital badges because they promote PD by effectively providing recognition for efforts by educators to complete a set of skills and to share their accomplishments with stakeholders. However, bringing the actual knowledge and skills into the classroom may be a different story. The administrators could expect that fulfilling PD requirements or certification is evidence of a teacher's development, yet, ensuring professional development to reflect on students' lessons is a teacher's job.

Question: What technology can help educators in their professional development and also help them to become contributors to their colleagues' PD (professional development)?

Solution

OER Commons is a well-known and respected platform for open educational resources (OER) widely used by educators and learners worldwide. It is a free digital library that provides open educational resources (OER) and other teaching materials for educators. It was created by the Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education (ISKME) to assist educators in collaborating using OER and making educational resources freely available worldwide. The platform allows educators to search and filter resources based on various descriptive data: subject, educational level, standards, etc. Teachers, students, and other users can also contribute to the platform by tagging, rating, and reviewing materials. Through the "Open Author" feature, educators can create and publish their open educational source for other educators to use. My experience with the "Open Author" feature is that it is easy to create and publish. You do not have to be technically savvy to create a lesson and share. By being able to create and publish lessons, which may include class lessons for the

students as well as training for skills to improve professional development, and also evaluating by giving feedback about the teaching materials, you are becoming a contributor to colleagues' PD through technology.

However, it is important to note that OER Commons is a platform for hosting and sharing OER content rather than a scholarly source. The reliability of OER Commons as a source of information depends on the quality and accuracy of the individual resources hosted on the platform. While many of the resources on OER Commons have been developed by experts in their respective fields, others may be created by educators or students with varying levels of expertise. Therefore, it is always important to evaluate the credibility and accuracy of each individual resource before using it as a source in your own scholarly work. OER Commons has a process for ensuring the credibility and accuracy of the resources available on its platform. This process involves several steps:

- **Review by OER Commons staff:** Before a resource is published on OER Commons, it is reviewed by the OER Commons staff to ensure that it meets the platform's quality standards. The staff checks for issues such as accuracy, relevance, and appropriateness.
- **Peer review:** OER Commons also encourages its users to provide feedback on the resources available on the platform. Users can rate and review resources and provide feedback to the authors. This feedback can help identify any errors or inaccuracies in the resources.
- **Licensing:** OER Commons requires all resources on its platform to have an open license that allows for free use and sharing. This helps to ensure that the resources are credible and trustworthy.
- **Authorship:** OER Commons encourages authors to provide information about their qualifications and expertise, which can help users evaluate the credibility of the resource.
- **Ongoing review:** OER Commons regularly reviews the resources on its platform to ensure that they continue to meet its quality standards. (Retrieved from www.oercommons.org)

Overall, OER Commons takes several steps to ensure the credibility and accuracy of the resources on its platform. However, as with any source of information, it is still crucial for users to evaluate the quality of individual resources and exercise critical thinking when using them. One of the ways to avoid spending too much time validating the data is to collaborate with educators whom you can trust and who have the expertise to learn from each other. Creating PLN within the OER Commons using the "Groups" feature allows you to create a group that can share and grow together as educators. We have a common goal of improving student learning, but each educator is unique in their teaching style and the values they share. The focus of their teaching may reflect their goal and passion as an educator. It could serve as a driving force for development; surrounding yourself with colleagues who share the same goals and philosophy of pedagogy gives you more confidence about information being shared through the group. Creating and sharing lessons and evaluating and assessing together makes it a much better tool for collaboration than other platforms, which only allow the exchange of ideas and resources. Also, there is a "Hub" feature in which groups can come together for collaboration. Hub is a custom resource center on OER Commons where groups can create and share collections associated with a project or organization. Projects, institutions, states, and initiatives make use of Hubs to bring groups of educators together to create, organize, and share collections that meet their common goals. Groups motivate each other to solve problems to come up with open education resources to gain professional development and, at the same time, benefit colleagues by becoming contributors.



OER Hub

The most significant advantage of using OER is its freely available to all, addressing the equity issue of education. OERs can supplement textbooks and lectures where deficiencies in information are evident, enhance regular course content, increase student interaction with course resources, and reduce the cost of course materials for students. Being able to resolve equity issues through OER is how education should be in the long run. “Even after pandemic-related efforts to close the digital divide, there are gaps between what well-resourced schools and under-resourced schools are able to do.” (Shelton, 2021). Education should be free, and all should have access to it. It is an innate right of human beings. Once you put a price on it, there will be a divide between the privileged and the underprivileged. The question is, how do we keep the quality but keep it free? Adopting OER in the classroom may involve additional work on the part of faculty, instructional designers, editors, digital rights specialists, and others in order to find the OERs, adapt/modify them, check them for accessibility, verify any copyright issues, publish the resources in the institution’s learning management system (University of Maryland Global Campus). However, through “Groups” and “Hub” features, you can create stronger PLN to evaluate and modify teaching resources to better align with learning outcomes. As stated in the ISTE Standards for Educators 2.1 Learner: *Educators continually improve their practice by learning from and with others and exploring proven and promising practices that leverage technology to improve student learning*, building PLN and creating, publishing and sharing lessons through technology like OER can enhance professional development and able to contribute to colleagues’ PD.

References

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