



**Curriculum-based professional learning challenges us to consider what it means to engage as an active learner, developing understanding and making meaning.**

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## HERE WE GO

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# THE ART AND SCIENCE OF CURRICULUM-BASED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

**F**or the past five years, one of *The Learning Professional's* most popular articles has been a piece from December 2018 called “Teaching is an art — and a science” (Bouffard, 2018). The piece, and the issue in which it appeared, were part of Learning Forward’s commitment to increasing the emphasis on curriculum and instructional materials in our work, a shift that we have maintained in the ensuing years.

The article began: “Is teaching an art or a science? It’s a little of both. There is artistry in the way teachers connect with students and foster their understanding. At the same time, there is a science to teaching and learning, an evidence base on which to build our approaches to developing students’ knowledge, skills, and competencies.”

That balance of art and science that so strongly resonates with educators is at the core of curriculum-based professional learning, the term we now use to describe educator learning that is grounded in high-quality instructional materials and the principles of high-quality professional learning.

Over the past five years, we’ve found that curriculum-based professional learning is sometimes misunderstood as an effort to script teachers’ every move or to decrease teachers’ agency to address diverse student needs. In practice, curriculum-based professional learning is a way of supporting educators’ deep understanding of curriculum and ability to apply it with both integrity and responsiveness to students. It helps teachers hone the artistry and science of excellent instruction that leads to rigorous and equitable learning.

Educators come to new curricula with varied backgrounds and expertise, often with little experience facilitating the inquiry, critical thinking, and meaning-making that characterize today’s highly rated curricula. Professional learning that mirrors those qualities can build educators’ expertise regardless of their previous exposure or career stage.

Articles throughout this issue illustrate what it looks like when educators engage in experiential collaborative professional learning around curricula. They show how professional learning supports teachers, principals, principal supervisors, coaches, and district leaders as skilled, empowered facilitators of student learning. They also describe how to build systems that make this kind of professional learning — and, ultimately, high-quality instruction — the norm.

A common thread across these initiatives is that educators take the role of learners. Curriculum-based professional learning challenges us to consider what it means to engage as an active learner, developing understanding and making meaning. One way it does this is by inviting educators to assume the role of student so they experience the lessons, strategies, and materials just as their students will. Putting on the “student hat” shifts educators’ perspectives on the curriculum content and how to teach it in ways that develop student understanding.

At a time when educator morale is troublingly low, Learning Forward believes that curriculum-based professional learning — when done well and in alignment with the Standards for Professional Learning — can refuel educators’ excitement about teaching and learning.

Most importantly, we see how it leads to improvements for students. Those changes don’t come from simply purchasing a box of materials. They come from educators learning together to combine the art and science of teaching to ensure that all students benefit from high-quality curriculum and instruction.

## REFERENCE

**Bouffard, S. (2018, December).** Teaching is an art — and a science. *The Learning Professional*, 39(6), 5. ■