PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GETS PERSONAL

Gary Stager walks us through his own personal approach to professional development

STORY BY Gary Stager

Seymour Papert once said, "Schools are such bad places for children to learn because they are bad places for teachers to learn." Teacher professional development needs to be in a context, and pedagogical style, that models our highest ideals for educating children. Good teaching is good teaching.

My approach to professional development over the past thirty-five years is based on four perspectives.

■ We should treat teachers with respect and dignity

■ Professional development should directly help teachers better serve students, not complete clerical chores. Learning to master a new technology is an often complex or frustrating process. That process is compounded when we associate learning to use technology with something you dislike or resent doing.

■ We should treat teachers with respect and dignity. They are competent and therefore our PD efforts do not need to treat them like infants of felons. 'Training' is for circus animals, not professionals. Teachers should not require training in using Google or an iPad, something every toddler has mastered pretty well by now without government funding.
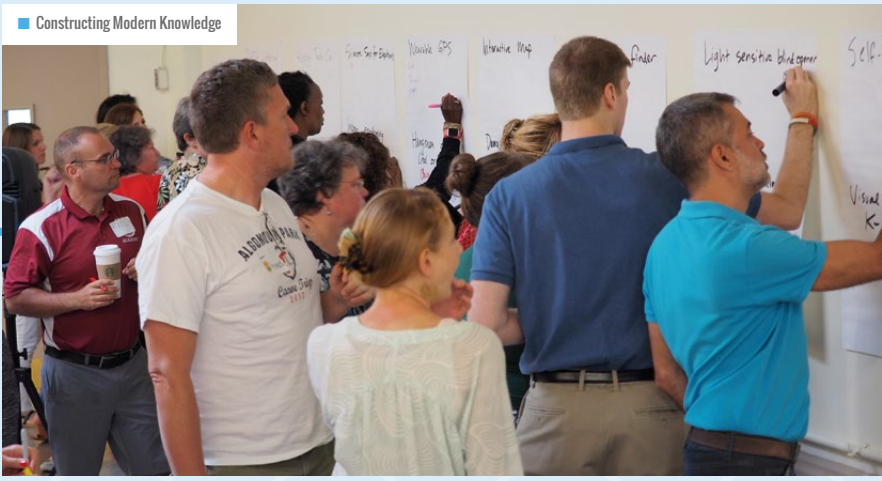
■ Given the scarcity of time and resources found in schools, professional development has an obligation to blow an educator's mind and motivate them to continue learning long after the PD ends.

■ The project should be a teacher's smallest unit of concern. The same goes for PD leaders.
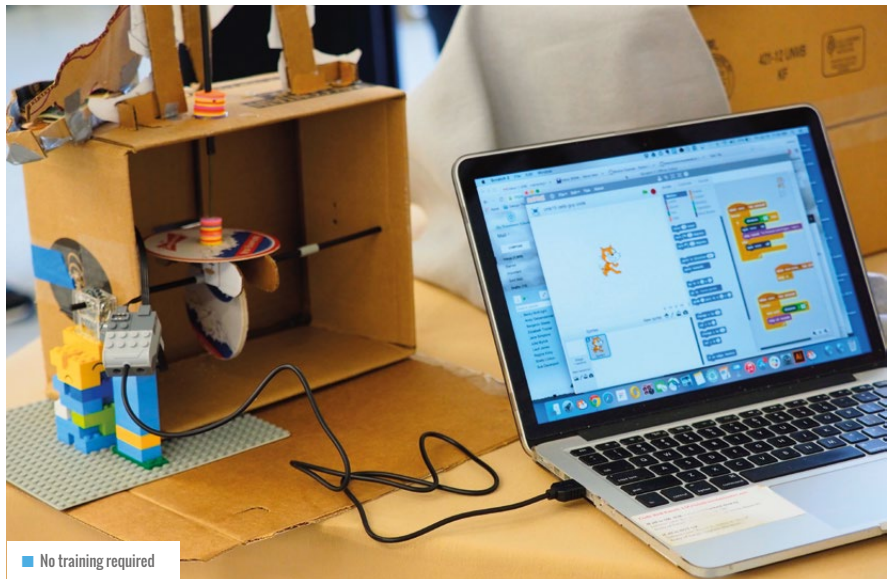
■ No training required

Constructing Modern Knowledge

Fitbit sneakers

Colour-changing glove

Popular children's author Peter Reynlds rides the cardboard tricycle

A decade ago, I created Constructing Modern Knowledge, a summer institute where educators from around the world gather to learn about learning by learning with cutting-edge technology and a mountain of other materials, while working on personally meaningful project development, and without either coercion or formal instruction.

appropriate materials, sufficient time, and a supportive culture, including a range of expertise, people are able to exceed their wildest expectations.

Over the past few institutes, dozens of remarkable projects have emerged. These

> ## " ALL OF MY WORK IS BASED ON THE PIAGETIAN PRINCIPLE THAT KNOWLEDGE IS A CONSEQUENCE OF EXPERIENCE

All of my work is based on the Piagetian principle that knowledge is a consequence of experience. Each CMK begins with participants sharing ideas for what they wish to make, quickly followed by four days to work on such projects. Each year, CMK participants confirm my hypothesis, "A Good Prompt is Worth 1,000 Words." With a good prompt or interesting challenge,

include: Fitbit sneakers that light with each step and perform a dance show when your step goal is reached; a mechanical and digital sculpture capturing the poetry of wind; automated greenhouses and systems to water thirsty plants; an adult-size cardboard tricycle; a four-person Chinese dragon, complete with eTextiles and microcontroller-based eyes; a helium balloon-powered drone; and working versions of Pokémon Go, including information about the local community and even our institute space. (HW)

TIPS FOR PD SUCCESS

- Ask participants to take off their teacher hats and put on their learner hats!

- Expect the impossible, and your students will surprise you.

- Whimsy, beauty, playfulness, and mystery are powerful contexts for learning.

- Focus on powerful ideas, not step-by-step mechanics.

- Offer maximum choice in projects and processes.

- Establish an absence of coercion. Operate under the assumption that your students want to be there. "Nothing beautiful can ever be forced." - Xenophon

- Supply sufficient materials and time. Quality work takes time and you don't want people waiting around for materials.

- Papert teaches us that the best learning results from hard fun.

- Less us, more them. Provide a minute or two of instruction, suggest a prompt or challenge, and then shut up. The more agency one can bestow upon learners, the more they will accomplish.