

# How to teach teachers amidst the pandemic

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In a new study published this week in *The Learning Professional*, a University of Colorado Denver researcher looked at best practices for

educating teachers in an online environment. Known as professional learning, this type of learning is different from professional development in the sense that it is typically interactive, sustained, and customized to teachers' needs—not a one-size-fits-all workshop. It is the practice of teachers taking responsibility for their own learning, and practicing what they are learning in their own teaching contexts.

In the article, researcher Laura Summers, clinical assistant professor in the School of Education & Human Development, outlined a myriad of ways in which we can be the most prepared to engage with our teachers in virtual professional learning.

Why is this so critical to examine now? The pivot to online education due to the coronavirus pandemic was sharp for some—in fact, many teachers began teaching in a purely online format for the first time ever when the crisis hit.

For efficacious virtual professional learning, Summers emphasizes three primary rules: the learning is grounded in social and [emotional learning](#); self-efficacy is at the forefront; and the challenges of a virtual environment are understood.

## **Work grounded in social and emotional learning**

SEL—short for social and emotional learning—is defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) as the "the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions." SEL is of particular importance amidst the global pandemic, as it helps educators, families, and students manage stress, develop resilience, and maintain a sense of optimism during challenging times.

Summers outlines a few key competencies:

- Build trusting relationships
- Foster self-reflection
- Foster growth mindset
- Cultivate perseverance
- Create community
- Promote collaborative learning
- Respond constructively across differences.

## **Empowering educators through self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy is defined as the belief in one's capacities to be successful. Summers notes that teachers' self-efficacy is amplified when they receive coaching—even if it is conducted virtually.

"Teachers may film their own practices and get coaching feedback through a virtual coaching protocol, which can increase self-efficacy," says Summers. "Coaches give feedback from cycles of inquiry verified using evidence of student learning, which makes a huge difference."

A virtual learning community also allows participants to learn at their own pace, and on their own time. They can view filmed examples of best practices, observe and discuss them, and ask questions of their peers who are also trying new strategies. All of this leads to increased self-efficacy.

## **Recognizing virtual learning challenges**

It is paramount that professional learning follows [best practices](#), including ample breaks, time to collaborate, and a moment to practice what they are learning, Summers explained.

"Asking a [teacher](#) to attend a virtual session for more than 45 minutes at a time is not conducive to learning," says Summers. "It's important to allow for breaks from sitting at the computer if the professional learning takes place over hours or days."

Certain technology, such as polling, increases learners' participation in lectures, promotes connection to the content, and provides immediate feedback to the facilitator.

## Looking Ahead

"As the school year begins, we need to prepare for the unknown," says Summers. "We have the opportunity to shift practices, even with limited background in online teaching, if our professional learning approaches prioritize social and emotional learning, empower educators through self-efficacy, and pay attention to adult learners' needs."

**More information:** The study is available online:  
[learningforward.org/journal/tu ... ogy/the-right-blend/](https://learningforward.org/journal/tu...ogy/the-right-blend/)

Provided by University of Colorado Denver

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