It’s Your Turn to Learn

These creative ideas will boost your professional development, up your teaching game, and supercharge your brilliant career.

BONUS: 7 Cool Podcasts for Teachers
PD Made Personal

Education workshops and conferences aren’t the only path to professional development. Try these informal—and fun—ways to grow in your career.

Get out of school. Visit your local zoo to brainstorm an animal-focused science curriculum, or hit an art museum to find inspiration for cross-curricular lesson plans. Zoos and museums often have education directors who can help you use their resources, both virtually and in person. Some institutions also have programs just for teachers.

Be dramatic. Take an improv or acting class. You’ll improve your classroom presence and think-on-your-feet skills, boosting your confidence and enhancing your connection to your students. To make it more fun, convince some of your teacher pals to join you.

Learn for free online. Diving into a brand-new subject expands your mind and can stimulate creativity that carries over into your teaching. Online MOOCs (Massive Online Open Courses) are often free if you don’t need a certificate of completion, and offer a broad range of classes—coding, archaeology, 20th-century history, photography, and more—from top universities around the world. To get started, check out Coursera.com.

Join the club. Join an organization such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, National Council of Teachers of English, or the National Organization for the Education of Young Children. You’ll get access to teaching journals, magazines, and on-demand webinars that you can use for independent study.

Start a book group. Visit your school or district’s book room or your public library, and check out one professional development book each month. Read it, try it, use it, and then write up a quick reflection. Even better, ask a friend at school to be your book buddy.
Put Your Headphones On

Podcasts are a great way to pick up teaching tips while you commute, work out, or prep dinner. Some educator faves:

**Science Underground** (2 min)
TED speaker and inventor-scientist Ainissa Ramirez delivers fun, understandable science lessons—how space suits work, why fireworks explode—in two-minute hits.

**The 10-Minute Teacher Show with Vicki Davis, the Cool Cat Teacher** (10 min)
Vicki Davis, a high school teacher and IT director, interviews a new expert every weekday about hot education topics such as cyberbullying, edtech, and motivating special-needs students.

**Stories From the Teaching Life With Penny Kittle** (15–20 min)
Relatable, engaging first-person essays about classroom life, told by an experienced English teacher.

**Educators 2 Educators** (30 min)
Host Carrie Conover chats with educators about innovative ways to transform your teaching. Recent episodes have covered digital citizenship, diverse learning, resilience, and ESL.

**Angela Watson: Truth for Teachers** (30–40 min)
Teaching coach Angela Watson serves up practical solutions for managing student behavior and motivational tips to energize your teaching.

**Art Made Easy** (60 min)
Creative classroom ideas from K–8 art teachers, and useful strategies for any educator who uses art in their lesson plans.

**StarTalk Radio** (60 min)
Popular astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson interviews experts in physics, science, technology, and education—showing how science can be fun and accessible for a broad audience.
Reconnect with your inner beginner. Now that you’re a pro in the classroom, you may forget what it’s like to have new-job jitters. Put yourself in your mentee’s shoes by trying something new: kickboxing, ballet, painting, or anything to stretch beyond your comfort zone.

Branch out. Ask to be paired with a new teacher who has a different personality or teaching philosophy. Hearing a fresh perspective will help you both become better teachers.

Make introductions. Schools are complex social systems, so don’t just share your expertise, share your network as well. Being a connector is a great way to polish your own workplace social skills.

Put in on the schedule. You’ll likely have quick chats with your mentee in the hallway, teachers’ lounge, and via text all week long. But to be a really effective manager, set up an official weekly check-in meeting, where you can sit together and talk through any challenges she’s facing that week.

Don’t give up. Your mentee doesn’t have to take your advice, and often may not. Don’t take it personally. Building your resilience as a teacher is always a win!
Time to Get Your MEd?

Earning an advanced degree in education is the ultimate professional learning experience. Four things to think about before you take the leap:

1. The timing. Taking graduate classes while teaching full-time is a big commitment. Consider how you’d fit in classes and coursework: Could you do your homework at night while your kids do theirs? Tap your spouse to take on extra chores? Put off a splurge-y family vacation this year? Dial back on volunteer commitments? If there isn’t time this year, make it a goal for next year.

2. The right program. Not every program works for every learner. Do you need face-to-face classes? Do you learn best in your pajamas as an online student? Some people earn their advanced degree in a year, while others take three. The right choice is the program that fits your life and your schedule.

3. Your support network. Professional support will make your journey easier, so connect with other teachers in your school or district who are working on a degree. Plan group study dates, get together for coffee chats every few weeks, help each other out with presentations, and send funny texts when you need to blow off steam.

4. The outcome. Graduate school is a lot of work, but it’s also incredibly rewarding. You’ll gain new expertise, be in the position to earn a higher salary (yes!), and get to put what you learn into practice each day with your students. Keep these awesome benefits in mind when you’re considering the challenges.

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