This collection of proposal mentor texts provides models to first-time (or returning) presenters on how to design successful proposals.

Working toward "Critical Professional Development" for Teachers

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Annotation: Professional development is the most common topic of complaint from teachers; it is often lacking in pedagogical strategy, limited by presenter experience, or presented as a one-off initiative. Kohli et al.'s (2015) articulation of "critical professional development" is a framework for teacher-led, politically engaged professional development that motivates and supports adult learners.

Description: In the English Language Arts classroom, teachers hope to inspire, motivate, encourage, challenge, transform. In professional development, administrators hope to… communicate key logistics? Force top-down mandates? Put teachers to sleep? We're sure the answers wouldn't line up with the dreams we have for our students. Yet we must view professional development as a space that is rich with opportunity: it is one of the core levers we have to convince teachers to adopt new practices, revise existing curricula, adjust behaviors, and reassess their understanding of their students.

Critical Professional Development, first coined by Kohli et al. in a 2015 article, is a framework for "reposition[ing teachers] as transformative intellectuals who, in solidarity, have a political analysis and take action for social justice." This framework is in direct contrast to many popular models of professional development, which position teachers as passive, apolitical, and incompetent. Before our current roles as leaders of professional development, we sat in too many rooms where professional development was delivered at us for a purpose that seemed arbitrary.

In roles now as teacher-leaders, we are responsible for reconsidering how to construct professional development that feels transformative and active: that positions teachers as the agents of change that schools so desperately need. In our workshop, we will share strategies for subverting institutional systems to create new modes of professional development. We will also share specific examples of professional development that support teachers to actively develop "professional discourse… focused on using education as a vehicle for equity and justice" (Kohli et al. 2015).

Creating innovative professional development is a multi-layered effort; we will present leadership strategies for navigating institutional politics as well as tangible meeting and PD structures that support teachers to be the drivers of their learning. Developing critical professional development requires forming an anti-hierarchical leadership stance, which is contrary to many of the existing schooling systems in which we work. Leaders who want to encourage faculty to critically collaborate and grow together must first investigate their own stance toward their role.

In our presentation, we will support participants to self-assess their stance toward professional development and describe their vision for the teachers they lead. This compass will support participants to creatively brainstorm formats for professional development that can work within their institutional structures to empower teachers and transform the conditions for student learning. Bree Picower, in a 2015 article on critical professional development, articulates the urgent need for "teacher-driven, inquiry-based professional development." We believe school leaders can create the setting for this kind of meaningful work to happen for teachers, as long as they can articulate those goals in advance and consider institutional barriers.

Using our goals for professional development, we will then guide participants through possible structures that support teacher inquiry, teacher ownership, and teacher engagement in issues of equity and justice. We will describe our own interventions, including strategies for supporting peer observations, meeting structures that support participation, teacher-led professional development in the departmental and school setting, and possibilities for engaging students in developing activities for teacher PD.

Accessibility as Abundance: Leading Teachers in Designing Accessible Learning
Nicholas Emmanuele; Benjamin K. Woodcock

Annotation: We talk a lot about UDL, RTI, MTSS, and SDI to support students with various disabilities, behaviors, or linguistic repertoires. Join us in exploring how two leaders supported their colleagues in making learning accessible, and collaborate with others on how to design professional learning experiences for teachers to increase accessibility and inclusivity in the English classroom.

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"Literacy leadership must engage students in meaningful, abundant practices in how we engage with various texts and develop communication abilities. Sometimes in those discussions, students with disabilities, students with particular behaviors, or emergent multilingual students are afterthoughts in curriculum design or teacher professional learning experiences, rather than embedded in our practice. Universal Design for Learning principles can assist teachers in their lesson design practices and then alleviate the need for so many individual adaptations that may commonly be found in Individualized Education Plans (IEP) or Section 504 plans. The conference theme of "abundance" is especially prevalent in these conversations: how can learning be abundant when some student needs are not considered or when some teachers do not feel comfortable

addressing some student learning variations? Accessibility is abundance. With so many teachers of varying years of work experience and varying degree program experiences, how do literacy leaders center the needs of all students in professional development sessions and in guidance for in-service teachers?

In this session, Nick and Ben will open with some basic principles of Universal Design for Learning and accessibility practices to ensure participants are working with shared understandings (10 minutes). Then, each presenter will share the processes and practices in engaging their departments and teachers in considering accessible education practices. Nick will share how he introduced UDL to his team, had them listen to short, 10-minute podcast episodes by Katie Novak (and provided a fifteen-minute walk-and-listen break), share their thinking, and then modeled designing and adapting a writing task before providing some compiled adaptation options for students with IEPs and emerging multilingual learners (10 minutes). Next, Ben will share how he contributed to two Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) committees (building-level and district-level) to develop Universal Accommodations for all high school students to utilize in each of their classes. He will share the creation process for the accommodations, how he piloted a few accommodations, and then how the first full year of implementation went in his classroom. (10 minutes).

The next twenty minutes of the session will provide attendees to collaborate with one another on accessibility practices in their contexts. These table-groups may draft their own accessibility or adaptation guidelines, discuss challenges of inclusive and accessible education in their schools, share their own processes of providing support to teachers, and brainstorm potential professional learning opportunities for their teams around accessibility or adaptations in English education.

To close the session, participants will be able to briefly share out key take-aways and next steps (10 minutes).

Countering Stories of Scarcity and Fear to Promote Abundance and Satisfaction
Cris Tovani; Samantha Bennett

Annotation: Literacy Leader Cris Tovani and her Coach Sam Bennett will empower leaders to move away from fear to embrace the complexity and artistry of the teaching profession. They will share five categories of scarcity they encounter when working with teachers and provide strategies that literacy leaders can use to help colleagues feel empowered to switch their mindset of scarcity to one of abundance.

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"We are not creatures of circumstances. We are creators of circumstances."
Benjamin Disraeli former Jewish Prime Minister of Britain

Entering into the field of education is tough and universities all over the country report a decline in teacher candidates. Veteran teachers hold on until they can retire and worry there will be no one to replace them. Meeting mandates with less funding, working with students who are striving learners, and teaching in an environment of fear creates educators who have the debilitating state of "not-enough-ness." The delusion of scarcity haunts them and zaps teachers of their energy.

Beliefs drive our practices. Sometimes the stories we tell ourselves turn into beliefs that bind us to a scarcity mindset which in turn affects instructional practices. If a colleague creates the story that there "is no time," he might not use the time he has effectively but rather waste it complaining to colleagues. When teachers tell us that they can't plan compelling units because their district is making them use a scripted program, it lets them off the hook to curate and adjust the curriculum to meet more needs of their students. When a teacher bemoans that her students can't or won't read, she may give up on strategy instruction and curating an abundance of accessible, beautiful text.

When educators live in a mindset of scarcity, fear erupts and students are robbed of joyful learning. Literacy leaders can help teachers bring abundance back to the classroom, by empowering them to move away from fear and embrace the complexity and artistry of the teaching profession. During this session, Literacy Leader Cris Tovani and her instructional Coach Sam Bennett will share five categories of scarcity from comments they encounter when working with teachers. They will provide ideas/tools/strategies that literacy leaders can use to help colleagues feel empowered to switch their mindset of scarcity to one of abundance.

As Literacy Leaders, what learning conditions can we create to help teachers who say:
"My students won't or can't read." (Scarcity of Knowing Students Deeply)
"I have to teach this topic/text in this specific way." (Scarcity of Teacher Agency)
"It's so easy to cheat now with AI." (Scarcity of Trusting Student Capacity)
"Kids don't care, so why should I?" (Scarcity of Trusting Students)
"I don't have time." (Scarcity of Time)

When exploring the categories of scarcity, Sam and Cris will share strategies literacy leaders can use to gently shift teachers back to a mindset of abundance:

Abundance of Joy: Aligning Beliefs, Practices, and Cognitive Science
Abundance of Choice: Choice drives engagement in-text, what we give our time to, and ways to structure time

Abundance of Efficacy/Teaching and Learning Strategies: Kids and teachers would if they could; ways to scaffolding learning
Abundance of Purpose: Here's what I get to teach and why it matters to students.
Abundance of Prioritizing: What do I give my time to? What matters most to learning?

During this session, participants will have opportunities to view examples of teachers and students working from a mindset of abundance. Participants will read and annotate research, sample lessons, and reflections, from teachers and students, write to design their own future plans, and discuss impact with other literacy leaders. They will leave with ideas, strategies, and research excerpts to use with colleagues.

We hope you will join us to learn more about turning the stories of scarcity into instructional practices that engender satisfaction and create a sense of abundance in the classroom. When we view our work through the lens of abundance, teaching and learning are no longer a job but a joy.

Designing for Abundance—Universal Design for Learning as a Pathway to Literacy for All
Melissa Garcia

Annotation: Literacy can be constrained by rigid structures. Universal Design for Learning offers a framework for abundant access, engagement, and expression in reading and writing. This session explores how UDL principles can transform literacy instruction by removing barriers, fostering creativity, and ensuring that all students—regardless of ability, background, or learning style—experience plentitude.

Description: Literacy can be constrained by rigid structures. Universal Design for Learning offers a framework for abundant access, engagement, and expression in reading and writing. This session explores how UDL principles can transform literacy instruction by removing barriers, fostering creativity, and ensuring that all students—regardless of ability, background, or learning style—experience plentitude. In a world where literacy is often constrained by rigid structures, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) offers a framework for abundant access, engagement, and expression in reading and writing. This session explores how UDL principles can transform literacy instruction by removing barriers, fostering creativity, and ensuring that all students—regardless of ability, background, or learning style—experience the plentitude of literacy.

Participants will engage in hands-on exploration of UDL-aligned strategies and digital tools that expand literacy opportunities. At the same time, they will critically examine how abundance in literacy can be distributed equitably—challenging the ways in which privilege and systemic barriers shape access to meaningful learning experiences.

Guiding Questions:

- How can UDL create spaces of plentitude and support for diverse learners?
In what ways does UDL challenge traditional literacy hierarchies and deficit-based narratives?
- How can literacy leaders ensure that abundance in instruction does not reinforce excess, consumerism, or inequity?
- How do multimodal approaches to reading and writing redefine what it means to be literate?

Takeaways: Participants will leave with practical UDL strategies and tools to make literacy more accessible, engaging, and flexible, ensuring that abundance in literacy is both meaningful and equitably distributed.

Activity: The Abundance of Literacy – A UDL Exploration

Objective: Participants will engage with literacy materials designed using UDL principles, analyze their impact on accessibility and engagement, and design their own UDL-infused literacy experiences

Step 1: UDL in Action – Literacy Stations (15 minutes)
Participants will rotate through stations, each featuring a different UDL literacy tool or strategy:
- Multimodal Reading – Listen to an audiobook while following along with text, using an immersive reader for text-to-speech and annotation.
- Flexible Writing – Experiment with voice-to-text software, graphic organizers, and alternative storytelling methods (e.g., visual storytelling, video responses).
- Interactive Annotation – Engage with digital annotation tools that allow students to highlight, comment, and ask questions in multiple formats.
At each station, participants will experience UDL in action and reflect on how these tools expand literacy access and engagement.

Step 2: The UDL Abundance Reflection (10 minutes)
Each participant will receive a three-column chart labeled:
- "Abundance Created" (Who benefits? How does this expand access?)
- "Potential Pitfalls" (Are there risks of over-reliance, exclusion, or implementation barriers?)
- "Equity Considerations" (Who might still be left out? What supports are needed for true inclusion?)
Groups will discuss and chart their insights.

Step 3: UDL Literacy Challenge – Designing for Plentitude (25 minutes)
In small groups, participants will redesign a traditional literacy lesson using UDL principles. They will:
- Identify barriers in a conventional reading or writing activity.

- Apply UDL principles (multiple means of representation, and expression) to make it more accessible.
- Consider how to ensure abundant access while avoiding excessive complexity or inequity.
- Present a 1-minute pitch on how their redesigned lesson fosters literacy abundance.

Step 4: Reflection & Action Steps (10 minutes)
Participants will reflect on:
- What shifts in mindset are needed to embrace abundance in literacy through UDL?
- How can they advocate for UDL in their schools and leadership roles?
- What first steps will they take to integrate UDL for expanding literacy access?
- Each participant will write a concrete action step to bring back to their schools.

Toward Creative Abundance: How to Harness Teachers' Maker Spirit to Internalize and Enhance Mandated Curriculum
Sarah Zerwin; Katie Miles; Samantha Bennett

Annotation: How do teachers think, feel, and act when they are met with an abundance of trust and specific strategies to enhance and layer mandated curriculum to ensure their students grow and thrive? In this session, we will be studying a variety of ways to get teachers investigating, creating, building around, and within a mandated curriculum to increase student engagement and their own.

Description: How do teachers think, feel, and act when they are met with an abundance of trust and specific strategies to enhance and layer mandated curriculum to ensure their students grow and thrive? In this session, we will be studying a variety of ways to get teachers investigating, creating, building around, and within a mandated curriculum to increase student engagement and their own. The mandated adoption of pre-written curricula is an issue faced by districts across the United States. Many teachers see adoptions as a mistrust of teachers as professionals and of their unique ability to personalize learning for the wide range of individual students before them. Prioritizing fidelity to a specific instructional program over fidelity to the unique set of student needs in a classroom is increasingly becoming a new norm, one that ultimately erodes trust between all stakeholders.

As literacy leaders, this puts us in a difficult position, and yet, we must remember that one of the most impactful approaches to promoting best and next practice is to create the conditions for teacher engagement in learning, so they may do the same for their students.

We must ask ourselves: How do teachers think, feel, and act when they are met with an abundance of trust and specific strategies to enhance and layer mandated curriculum to ensure their students grow and thrive? In this session, we will be studying a variety of ways to get teachers investigating, creating, building around, and within a mandated curriculum to increase student engagement and their own.

Like other large districts around the country, Colorado's Boulder Valley School District has purchased and prioritized the use of a comprehensive, standards-based reading curriculum called CommonLit. As of the 24-25 school year, middle level ELA teachers in BVSD are required to sequence and implement units and use instructional materials prescribed by CommonLit. This mandate marks a significant shift in a district where teacher autonomy and agency has historically been a core value.

Assuming that this mandate would soon be required at the high school level, and knowing the potential negative impact of prescribed curriculum on student engagement, Sarah Zerwin and Katie Miles, two veteran ELA teachers in BVSD set out to understand: if CommonLit becomes a requirement for our classrooms too, what can we do to maintain the student-driven culture of learning that underpins our current practice?

In this session, participants will read, write, and talk to build their background knowledge on best practices for TEACHER engagement, watch Katie and Sarah plan with veteran coach, curriculum expert, and author Samantha Bennett, and then spend time revising a unit with both teacher and student engagement in mind.

These practices are backed by a variety of research-based practitioners. Long-time professional learning expert, Jim Knight ("Five Myths About Teacher Professional Learning," ASCD, March 1, 2025), warns against adopting one-size-fits-all programming because it fails to put students first. Instead, Knight suggests that leaders "partner with teachers to set a student-focused goal and help the teacher refine and improve" the implementation of newly adopted curricula until that goal is met. This approach aligns with Daniel Pink's thinking on the autonomy, mastery, and purpose necessary for engagement (Drive, 2009) and veteran High School educator Cris Tovani's curricular designs for cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement (Cris Tovani, Why Do I Have to Read This?, 2021).

One key outcome of engaging as professional learners is that we create an abundance of trust in each other – and build collective efficacy as we meet the complex needs of the students in our educational care. Through the experience of engaging in this process, teachers build their common knowledge and understanding, not just of WHAT sequence of tasks to implement, but the WHY the strategies we choose and the structures we use are best for students. We grow our capacity together and it is through this abundance of collective efficacy that we will be better able to center and grow students' skills, background knowledge, and humanity in equal measure.