

Transcript from Podcast

Stephanie Scaletta  
EDLD 5317  
September 25, 2025

## **Media Project: Unpacking CTE Why Hyper-Specific Training is the Only Way to Prep Students for Tomorrow's Jobs**

Welcome back to the deep dive. We're here to uh take that big pile of research and really distill it down into what you need to know. Today we are diving into a really critical part of our education system, career and technical education. You know, CTE.

Absolutely. CTE, it's um such a vital area, but it comes with some unique challenges, doesn't it?

It really does. I mean, think about it. These teachers are prepping students for highly specialized jobs, advanced manufacturing, complex health pathways, welding, Right. Skills that are constantly being updated by industry almost faster than you can keep up sometimes.

Exactly. So they've got this dual mandate gets students ready for good jobs and for college all while the content itself is well a moving target. So our mission today is to unpack the sources arguing that ongoing really specific professional learning or PL is absolutely essential.

It's not just helpful, it's foundational.

Right? Because the sources warned that without that targeted PL, these programs can quickly fall out of step with local industries actually need.

And that's a big problem. It affects student opportunities, community workforce.

You could end up funding programs teaching outdated skills.

So, we're not just talking about teachers clocking in training hours here.

No, no, not at all. This is about truly changing teaching practices in fields where the technical details, the safety, it all matters immensely. Generic training like uh a workshop on classroom management just doesn't cut it for teaching say new medical diagnostic procedures.

Okay, let's unpack that. What does the research tell us about why this specific content focused training actually works? Why does it stick?

Well, it really boils down to making it easier for teachers to actually use what they learn when the training is directly tied to their specific subject like welding or culinary arts.

Exactly. They're far more likely to bring those new strategies right into their classroom or lab. Research like Darling Hammond's work showed that sustained content specific development is really The key to changing practice makes sense. It's not just one more thing to do. It's a better way to do what they already have to do.

Precisely. Think about uh a culinary teacher. If they get specific training on, say, new food safety regs or advanced plating techniques linked to industry standards, they can immediately see how to update their lessons, their assessments, how to connect it to getting that Surf Safe certification students need. It's directly applicable, right? It bridges that gap between theory and the reality of the kitchen lab.

Yeah.

You mentioned culinary. Was there a specific example in the sources?

Yeah, there was a great case. A district ran this uh focused 2-day summer course just for their culinary pathway teachers.

Not just generic teaching tips then.

No, it drilled down into core culinary skills and how to teach them effectively aligned with current industry needs.

And what happened? Did it make a difference quickly?

It did. The teachers apparently went right back and redesigned assessment rubrics to focus on those industry competencies. Things like um uh food safety, specific technical skills, even customer service aspects, and they use technology too, right?

Mhm. They brought in digital tools, simulations, so students could practice things like recipe scaling or menu costing before hitting the actual lab. Less waste, more practice on the management side.

Smart. So students started the year better prepared.

Exactly. Clear expectations, more confidence, better prep for those vital certifications. And the success was so obvious, the district immediately started planning similar PL for their welding instructors. Success breeds success. You know, that's powerful. But two days is just a start. The sources seem clear that this needs to be ongoing, right?

And collaborative.

Absolutely. That's where things like professional learning communities, PLC's come in. It's about teachers systematically working together, sharing what works, designing lessons, looking critically at student results.

But that takes time, which CDE teachers famously lack. They're teaching, running labs, managing student organizations, talking to partners.

That's the perennial challenge and its why technology becomes so crucial here. The sources mention tools like Teams, Zoom, Canvas. They let teachers collaborate across campuses, even across districts.

Ah, so a lone automotive teacher isn't quite so alone anymore.

Potentially, yes. They can share plans, ask questions, sustain that dialogue beyond just a scheduled workshop. It breaks down those barriers of time and distance.

And this collaboration ties into giving teachers more say. Isn't it? Something called the COVA framework. Choice, ownership, voice, and authentic learning. Yes. When teachers collaborate in a PLC, they gain ownership over adapting curriculum.

So instead of just delivering a standard lesson, right? They can tailor it. Maybe the standard curriculum is basic carpentry, but their local industry is boat building. The PLC gives them the space and support to integrate marine specific techniques. That's authentic learning driven by teacher expertise and local need.

Okay. But that ownership must sometimes clash with, you know, district mandates or state standards, right? There's a tension there.

Oh, absolutely. It's a constant balancing act. Teachers need flexibility, resources, time. Districts and STOs need accountability, alignment with standards, workforce results.

So, the PL can't just be a top- down directive.

Exactly. Research confirms that effective PL has to be more of a partnership, flexible, responsive to both teacher needs and those broader industry and state goals, not just a mandate.

So, assuming we navigate that tension, teachers get good specific PL they collaborate how do we know it's actually making a difference how do we uh see the results? you have to make the learning and its impact visible to everyone teacher's leaders even students it can't just be theory and how do you do that.

Well, the sources point to practical tools like three column table it sounds simple but it's effective.

Okay three columns what do they track

Column one the PL activity attended workshop on new CNC safety protocols column two the change in practice Updated lab safety checklist taught new protocols. Column three, measurable student outcome, fewer safety incidents, improved scores on safety assessment.

Ah, okay. It draws a direct line from the training to the classroom change to the student result. Makes the impact clear.

Exactly. It connects the dots. And again, tech helps. Digital portfolios, shared documents, ways for teachers to easily capture that evidence, the new checklist, student work samples, assessment data. It supports reflection and shows the real impact.

So it turns the investment in PL into visible proof of improvement in student readiness. That's the goal. Improved skills, better safety, higher certification rates, real workforce readiness.

Okay, wrapping this up then. The clear takeaway from our dive today seems to be for CTE, professional learning absolutely must be ongoing. It needs to be collaborative and maybe most importantly, it has to be content specific.

Those short generic sessions, they just don't move the needle on changing practice in these complex fields.

We know the barriers are real though. Time, money, keeping up with industry.

Definitely. And finding practical ways to overcome those barriers, maybe through these more flexible tech-enabled models. That's where the focus needs to be adapting the system to support the teachers.

So, here's a final thought for you to consider. We accept that time and resources are huge barriers, but if we also accept that this sustained specific learning is essential for CTE teachers,

Which the evidence suggests it is,

Then how might technology or these virtual communities we talked about allow us to fundamentally rethink the school schedule, maybe even the school year to actually carve out that critical development time? Yeah. Could the traditional calendar need to bend to make this work? Something to mull over?