

Online Teacher Resource Network

The Issue

Teachers, especially new teachers, spend considerable time and energy searching for or creating lesson plans, curricula, primary source documents and other resource materials. They often turn to the Internet, where there is an abundance of information—often, too much—but no quality control. Teachers need the very best resources that are aligned with the high standards and curriculum to which they should be teaching. Then they can better use their time honing their skills, adapting lessons to meet the needs of their particular students, and collaborating with and assisting their colleagues.

The Solution

As part of a new national investment in teacher quality, the AFT proposes partnerships with information technology companies and others to develop a comprehensive online research network for the nation's teachers, with high-quality information on curriculum, lesson plans, and primary and secondary source documents to enhance their classroom teaching. The responsibility for developing, collecting and expanding resources into an online clearinghouse is something that can be done best by educators, with the valuable support of the business community, foundations and the federal government. Teachers then have the responsibility to use these resources effectively to help children learn.

AFT's Role

At the AFT, we have been committed to helping teachers grow professionally through the use of technology. For example, AFT members in New York City were instrumental in working with public television to create a dynamic professional development conference, the Celebration of Teaching and Learning, which is often referred to as "the World's Fair of Teaching." Each year, this

conference attracts more than 8,500 educators who learn from the best of the best.

Educators also are partnering with public television in New York City to duplicate a successful effort in Great Britain. Since 2004, a consortium working closely with educators has been operating a program in England called Teachers TV. It is a 24/7 television channel and broadband service devoted to professional development of the K-12 workforce. The British government committed more than \$220 million over eight years to pay for it, and the response has been great. WNET, the flagship public television station in New York City, has signed an agreement that will lead to the creation of a similar service for educators in the United States, and union members in New York are very involved in the project.

On Nov. 5, 2008, the AFT launched a Web site for educators that provides information, materials and lesson plans to help students absorb the many teachable moments of the history-making presidential campaign of 2008 and the election of Barack Obama. The site includes broad lesson plans for all grade levels, and age-appropriate resource materials such as biographies of civil rights leaders and a timeline of key events in America's continuing effort to provide equal opportunity for all. In addition to providing information about historical events, the site helps explain the present-day dynamics that led to the Nov. 4 results. The site will be updated through the Jan. 20 Inauguration Day and beyond.

In addition, the AFT is a proud primary funder of Colorín Colorado, a free Web site that provides information, activities and advice for educators of English language learners (ELLs) and offers a variety of teaching and learning resources in Spanish geared toward parents of ELLs. Colorín Colorado's

resources include podcasts, videos and print materials, as well as interviews with expert researchers, children's book authors and classroom practitioners. Finally, the AFT has collaborated with Teachscape, an online professional development company, to develop and offer online courses and resources for both novice and veteran teachers.

An online teacher resource network would help bring teachers into the 21st century by facilitating their use of the Internet to support classroom instruction in deep, practical and meaningful ways.