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## Standards Spotlight: ISTE Learner Standard Provides a Road Map to Lifelong Scholarship

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# Learner standard provides a road map to lifelong scholarship

By Helen Crompton

Like most educators, I'm a learner first. I want to know all there is to know about teaching to best meet the needs of my students. That's why I went to college for 15 years to gain my teaching qualifications, including a master's degree and a Ph.D. in educational technology and mathematics education. I'm now a tenured professor, but I can honestly say that I'm only part way through my learning journey.

Even after 16 years in PK-12 classrooms, I still reflect on some of the same questions that nagged at me as a new teacher:

- Is this the best activity for students to understand the content?
- Are there better strategies for learning?
- Why do students have these misconceptions?
- How do I help students get this into long-term memory?

It can be easy for educators like me to keep teaching the same way we've always taught. The problem with doing that is that it doesn't allow us to learn new strategies and emerging tools, or stay current with research-based best practices.

Fortunately, when it comes to strategically embedding technology in learning, the ISTE Standards for Educators ([iste.org/standards/for-educators](http://iste.org/standards/for-educators)) provide a road map to reach your goals. The indicators under the standards provide concrete examples of what each standard looks like. And the Learner standard gets at the heart of what we should be doing every day. It states: *Educators continually improve their practice by*

*learning from and with others and exploring proven and promising practices that leverage technology to improve student learning.*

I really like the two-pronged statement: We try out things that have evidence showing they work, but we also explore other promising ideas. We want to improve our practice (our art) by learning from and with others and exploring proven and promising practices that leverage technology to improve student learning.

Let me unpack each indicator of the Learner standard to give you an idea what they look like in practice.

*1.a. Educators set professional learning goals to explore and apply pedagogical approaches made possible by technology and reflect on their effectiveness.*

This indicator is all about being intentional in what you want to accomplish. Some goals may be short-term and others might take longer, but they must be attainable. My advice is to select one or two areas to focus on at a time.

For example, you might set a goal to address the ISTE Standards for Students. But it's too overwhelming to work on all seven standards at once. A better approach is to start with one specific problem and figure out how to address it by applying the standards.

In my class, I wanted to figure out how to get students to participate in class discussions. I wanted to focus on students being Creative Communicators (Standard 6 of the ISTE Standards for Students). My previous



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method for getting students to share their thoughts and opinions was to just ask for a show of hands in response to my prompts. I found this produced answers from the same people each time, and additional responses just repeated what students had already said.

I learned with my students as we examined new tools such as Flipgrid, Twitter, Backchannel Chat, social networks and other tools connected to our Blackboard learning management system. When we discovered that some were not very effective, we switched to different tools and strategies.

I often polled the students for their opinions to ensure I was giving them a voice. One time I thought a class hated using the Backchannel Chat tool because they didn't respond when I asked aloud what they thought of it. In a private poll, however, I found out that students absolutely loved it and said it gave them a voice when they were shy.

*1.b. Pursue professional interests by creating and actively participating in local and global learning networks.*

I like to attend face-to-face conferences, and the ISTE conference is my favorite professional development experience. But to continue my learning year-round, I turn to technology to connect with and learn from others.

Twitter is my favorite tool for connecting with other educators. In the past, I would email a couple of edtech friends if I had a technology question. Now I post a quick question on Twitter to request help. I might get multiple responses to help me solve a problem or find what I'm looking for.

I really enjoy the limitation on words and that I don't have to read lengthy emails or documents to get to what I need. People on Twitter offer bite-sized chunks of information.

I might be looking for something in particular, such as a specific learning tool or strategy. Or I might be speed browsing and come across a tweet about how an educator transformed their teaching using a new approach to learning. Either way, I always come away with ideas I can use.

A couple of months ago, I stumbled upon a tweet about Renderforest, an online video, logo and website maker. At the time, I wasn't specifically looking for such a tool, but as soon as I read the short description, I immediately realized it was an ideal tool for my students to make videos and animations.

Twitter allows you to collaborate with others, too.

You can take part in regular edchats by following a particular hashtag at a designated time. Using a hashtag directs your question to those who can best support you.

I also use various social networks, including ISTE Professional Learning Networks, to help me connect with friends and colleagues across the globe who have become collaborative partners on grants and projects.

Interacting with other educators online has allowed me to have learning discussions that challenge my thinking and help me work through problems with others that extend what I understand about teaching. It's like having hundreds of supportive friends.

*1.c. Stay current with research that supports improved student learning outcomes, including findings from the learning sciences.*

Let's face it, all fields including education change over time. A strategy that we used to think was effective may turn out to be quite the opposite with new research. That's why it's so important to stay abreast of current learning sciences research.

Here are a few ways to ensure that your teaching practices align with the learning sciences, but also support ongoing research:

### **Search Google Scholar ([scholar.google.com](https://scholar.google.com))**

Sorting through evidence-based information on the internet can be daunting and time-consuming. One way to find meaningful and reliable sources of information is to use Google Scholar, which allows you to search across many disciplines and sources to find articles, theses, books, abstracts and court opinions from academic publishers, professional societies, online repositories, universities and other sites.

### **Follow Course of Mind ([courseofmind.org](https://courseofmind.org))**

Course of Mind is an ISTE initiative designed to help educators and education leaders leverage learning sciences and edtech to improve student learning. Through publications, podcasts, model policy and online courses, Course of Mind seeks to empower educators and leaders to embed learning sciences in teaching.

### **Partner with local universities on research projects**

Partnerships with universities can put you on the fast track to understanding up-to-date research findings that can be used in your school to improve systems, planning and practice.

To partner with a university, contact the dean or a department chair of the education department and ask if they're interested in

a partnership with you and the school. It's worth checking in with your school administration in case they have a prior connection. Once you partner, the university may have meetings and other initiatives you can participate in to help you stay abreast of the learning sciences and research in this area.

Invite researchers into your classroom. Teaming up with universities to tackle some of the big questions that come up in your classroom is one way to support improved learning outcomes. Researchers are always looking for questions that need to be examined further and a classroom they can test the ideas in.

To invite researchers in your classroom, scan the list of education department faculty to find those doing research in an area you're interested in. For example, my directory information can be found at [odu.edu/directory/people/c/crompton](https://odu.edu/directory/people/c/crompton) and shows that I focus on technology in education. You can send an email with your ideas, or even ask for a meeting so you can talk through them. When you chat with the researcher, remember that they're looking to see if you

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propose something they’d be interested in studying further. You should be doing the same. Here are some helpful questions to ask:

- What prior studies have you conducted similar to this topic?
- Is there some helpful literature I can read to learn more about this topic?
- What research methods do you use and what will it look like for me and my students?
- What ethics review procedures will you put in place to ensure the well-being of students being studied?
- How will they share the research findings with you?

You and the researcher may find that they’re not a good fit for the questions you’re seeking answers to, but they should be able to connect you with other researchers who are better suited.

As you work with good researchers, you’ll get advice and answers as the data come in. As a teacher, I had researchers in my class on a regular basis. They introduced

me to questions I hadn’t even thought about. I found the research and learning so exciting, it inspired me to become a professor.

I often hear teachers saying to students, “The more you put in, the more you get out.” It also works for adult learners. Education is a wonderful and very impactful profession. We need to become learners to ensure we’re doing the best that we can today for our students. 

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