

# CLASSROOM CAFFEINE

## A podcast for agency in professional learning

By **Lindsay Persohn**



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Education is in a state of flux. The COVID-19 pandemic caused teachers to re-envision educational opportunities as we worked to deliver quality instruction online, in person, and in various states in between. With the many challenges the pandemic presented, it also offered a renewed public interest in education and an opportunity for teachers to claim their rightful position as a community of informed, strategic, innovative, and effective professionals.

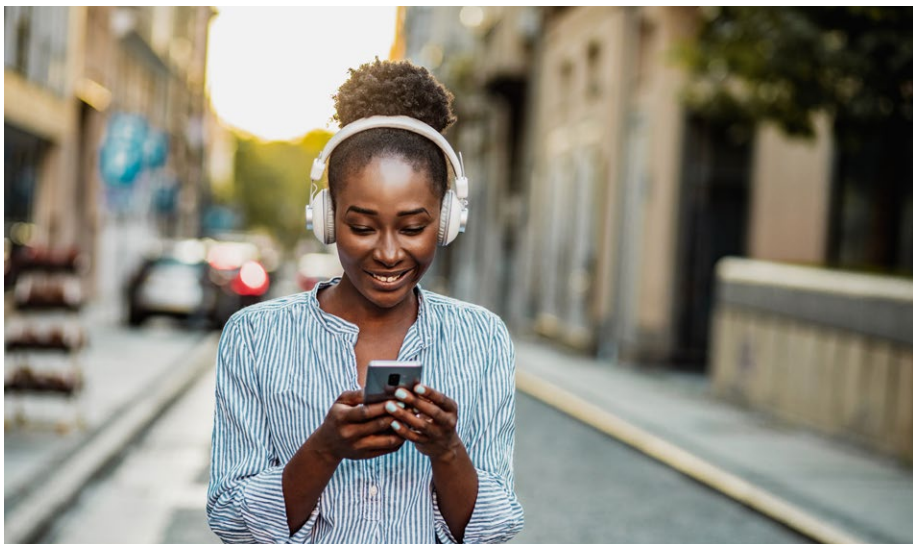
It wasn't just learning for students that changed. For far too long, professional learning opportunities for teachers arrived in a one-size-fits-all package, regardless of teachers' experience, knowledge, interests, or students. School communities can shift their approach to professional learning from the top-down model to learning that is driven by the needs and interests of individual teachers.

During the pandemic, we as teachers saw a plethora of personalized, virtual learning opportunities arise, like webinars offered through professional organizations such as the International Literacy Association. Many of these resources are free to the public or free to members. The virtual platform removes many place-based challenges of accessing learning; log on anywhere with an internet connection. Professional learning opportunities that are fully digitized—recorded, stored, organized, and accessible—loosen the constraints of timing, too. These shifts in accessibility afford a wide audience the opportunity to seek out individualized professional learning.

These learning opportunities are a critical step in the right direction, but I saw another untapped area with huge potential: podcasts. Education podcasts also offer ways to engage in learning about topics teachers care about at their own pace.

Recognizing this need inspired me to create *Classroom Caffeine*, a podcast series designed to provide flexible professional learning to inform, encourage, and empower teachers through thought-provoking conversations with some of the most influential literacy scholars of today.

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## The podcast series

*Classroom Caffeine* is an audio podcast series designed to energize teaching practice through informative, elevated conversations about literacy research translated specifically for implications in teaching practice. As the series host and producer, I see the potential of podcasts to significantly change the way education leaders disseminate research to a public audience. Through more traditional routes, education research can take anywhere from 10 to 50 years to make its way into practice. In my experience in public school classrooms and district offices, I have felt this rift. In my work in university classrooms and as a literacy researcher, I also note the absence of school voices in much of education research.

As one way to bridge these gaps, *Classroom Caffeine* aims to provide educators with free, direct, and accessible conversations with prominent researchers. In addition, the podcast website ([classroomcaffeine.com](https://classroomcaffeine.com)) offers a way for educators to communicate their questions and ideas to researchers. *Classroom Caffeine* differs from other education podcasts because the conversations often focus on a researcher's body of work rather than a specific publication or project. The result is a collection of some of the biggest ideas and most impactful details to come out of education research over the last several decades.

*Classroom Caffeine* conversations are designed to be easy to follow. Listeners can expect each conversation to center on three talking points.

First, each guest talks about one or two influential experiences in their career. Then, each guest discusses what they want teachers to know about their body of work. To conclude, each guest shares a message with teachers. These conversations pose points, counterpoints, and questions for serious critical and theoretical consideration, as well as immediately actionable ideas for classroom practice.

Topics range from the science of reading to the social aspects of learning, and from families as literacy partners to communities as sources of professional growth. Guests also touch on current vital topics such as Black Lives Matter, COVID-19, and digital technologies, drawing on wisdom from past experiences as we reckon with today's challenges and injustices. (See the chart on the next page for a list of guests and topics.)

This podcast series can help teachers narrow their pedagogical focus while broadening and examining their thinking around critical aspects of teaching and learning. As the show is now in its second season, practitioner educators will also be featured as guests to share their work and message with listeners.

Subscribing to the podcast means listeners will receive notifications when a new episode is available each week. The episodes are accessible in perpetuity after their release which, over time, generates a meaningful archive of many of the most distinguished and informed voices in literacy education. Although some episodes are shorter or longer, the

target 20-minute duration of a *Classroom Caffeine* episode is designed for teachers to listen during a school commute or while enjoying a cup of coffee or tea. Logistically, an audio podcast format—portable and easy to access—allows for busy teachers to engage in meaningful professional learning flexibly. Listening to a podcast is an option even when viewing a screen is not.

This casual approach to serious research makes for an inspiring experience that can help shape thinking and energize teaching practice. With this thinking, knowledge, and translation to practice, teachers can also find new ways to communicate with others about what they learn. In those conversations with colleagues, school leaders, and other stakeholders in education, *Classroom Caffeine* listeners have a simple way to cite some of the most influential scholars. The learning comes full circle when listeners access episode transcripts and share their reactions, questions, and ideas through the podcast website.

## Empowering educators

Teachers and school administrators are in the best position to understand the causes and complexities of the challenges in their own school contexts. Self-directed and on-demand professional learning opportunities provide accessible ways to devise solutions to local and systemic problems. What could happen if teachers took the driver's seat in their own professional learning? How could the school culture change?

When teachers' experience, knowledge, interests, and students become factors in continuous professional learning, these shifts can lead to change in the entire school ecosystem. Systemic changes start when a small group of influencers' small changes, ideas, and ways of being spill over to impact larger systems. Engaging in self-directed, on-demand, and virtual professional learning can provide teachers with the tools to enact real change at the school level. In achieving a collective efficacy, teachers as leaders in their local education communities and beyond are able to find increased engagement and joy in the work they do. ■

## CLASSROOM CAFFEINE PODCAST

GUEST	TOPICS	RELEASE DATE
David Reinking	Design-based research for the classroom	11/12/2020
James R. King	Relationships in the classroom	11/17/2020
Norman Stahl	The landscape of education research	11/24/2020
Patricia Edwards	Advocacy, honesty, family connections, and continuous growth	12/1/2020
Jenifer Jasinski Schneider	Children's multimodal writing	12/8/2020
Jerry Johns	Supporting readers who struggle	12/15/2020
Laurie Elish-Piper	Relationships and professional growth	12/22/2020
Doris Walker-Dalhouse	Students as individuals and growth from community	12/29/2020
Diane Lapp	Assessment for instruction and purposeful teaching	1/5/2021
Timothy Rasinski	Fluency, fun with words, and integrating social studies	1/12/2021
Peter Smagorinsky	Standardized testing and politics in education	1/19/2021
Leigh A. Hall	Supporting adolescent readers who struggle	1/26/2021
Timothy Shanahan	A framework for teaching and translating research	2/2/2021
Susan B. Neuman	Early childhood vocabulary and the whole child	2/16/2021
Peter Afflerbach	Student motivation, engagement, and assessment	2/23/2021
Victoria J. Risko	Teaching students, not curriculum; translanguaging	3/2/2021
Carol Lee	Humanizing the field of education and addressing the whole child	3/9/2021
Frank Serafini	Visible learning and expanding our view of literacy	3/16/2021
Patricia Leavy	The arts, the spark of creativity, and creating our own path in life	3/23/2021
Danielle Dennis	Teacher agency and asking questions to drive change in schools	3/30/2021
Tom Bean	Working with incarcerated adolescents and building relationships	4/6/2021
Peter Johnston	The effect of social imagination and meaningful conversations	4/13/2021
Mark Pacheco	Language-rich classrooms and emerging bilingual students	4/20/2021
Elizabeth Moje	Critical thinking across our lives and disciplinary literacy	4/27/2021
Jessica Pandya	Diverse schools and authentic writing in digital spaces	5/4/2021
Sandra Faulkner	Transforming the energy in classrooms and inclusive pedagogy	5/25/2021
Blaine Smith	Affordances of digital writing technologies	6/8/2021
Judith Dunkerly-Bean	Supporting children who identify as LGBTQIA+	6/22/2021
Jody McBrien	Supporting students who come to us as refugees	6/22/2021
Earl Aguilera	Interest-driven instruction, multimodal and critical literacies	7/20/2021
Alexandra Panos	Climate and social justice literacies in our own communities	8/3/2021
Noah Golden	Teachers as advocates and activists	8/17/2021
Mona Jain	Engaging with community and continuous learning	8/31/2021
P. David Pearson	The interconnected nature of learning and "the radical middle"	9/14/2021
Kevin Leander	Improvisation as a way to responsiveness in classrooms	9/28/2021
Gay Ivey	Reading motivation, listening to kids, and honest connections	10/12/2021
Marjorie Orellana	Shifting our mind-set to recognize the work kids are already doing	10/26/2021