



## Take a walk behind the learners you lead

When she was principal at Roosevelt Elementary School in Spokane, Wash., Shari Farris decided to investigate the learning and discipline problems of the immigrant students in her school by learning all she could about one student's experiences in the school. She used a professional learning design called shadowing and spent the day following Yasir, a 3rd grader, observing in fine detail his routines and interactions. You can read her article



about the experience — “In Yasir’s shoes” — beginning on p. 20.

Walking in someone else’s shoes isn’t easy. What would it look like to walk in the shoes of the other learners in schools and school systems — the educators — as they experience the professional learning available to them? As the people responsible for

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the educator learning in your context, consider what kinds of learning designs you would encounter if you had followed in the footsteps of your adult learners. Think about what levels of engagement and interaction you would see if you watched just one teacher or one school leader, perhaps one who you know struggles with their learning experiences. Presuming to understand another perspective can be dangerous, certainly, but consider what you might learn if you shed your preconceptions.

Take a walk behind the learners you lead — write down what you see. Who is engaged? What are the expectations of the facilitators or team leaders? How are the learners collaborating and contributing? Who enters the room prepared to learn? Who leaves the room motivated to dig deeper? Most importantly, what are the implications for those responsible for the professional learning?

Farris writes, “Empirical data falls short when trying to capture evidence of student disengagement, isolation, boredom, sadness, and frustration,” (p. 23). Does the empirical data you have about professional learning in your context take into account such critical elements of learning?

The Learning Designs standard — *Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes* — asks educators to be attentive to all such aspects of

learning. Not only must leaders of learning understand and address the many ways that adults learn, they must also take into account the goals that learners set, the goals of the school and school system, the resources available, and the content and design of learning. And, as with Yasir’s teachers and principal, learning leaders need to ensure that learners are actively engaged with the learning, that they have a voice in determining how and what they learn, and that they have opportunities to construct, discuss, reflect, analyze, and evaluate as they move to put their learning into practice.

Other articles in this issue explore an exciting range of designs for collaborative and individual learning, across schools, districts, and statewide. Start with Eleanor Drago-Severson’s reflections on adult learning (see p. 10), and consider her thoughts on the standard as you work your way through the learning strategies described in the rest of the issue. As always, learning starts with the end in mind, so goal setting is step one in planning learning. Read Stephanie Hirsh’s column on p. 68 on that topic, and use the tool on p. 55 to help in your own goal setting.

Finally, when you think about shadowing a learner, don’t forget yourself. What would someone following you observe? Be your own shadow. As a learner, the time you take to reflect upon and synthesize new ideas and approaches isn’t a luxury. It’s essential. ■