

EVERYONE AT SCHOOL IS A LEARNER

Years ago, Learning Forward (then NSDC) had a tagline that said, “At school, everyone’s job is to learn.” This is true in any workplace that calls itself a learning organization. To achieve continuous improvement, every professional has the responsibility to engage as a committed learner, willing to acknowledge and explore what he or she doesn’t understand.

Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning emphasize the needs and responsibilities of adults as learners. This is especially true for the Learning Designs standard, which states: *Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.* Within the standard are three critical concepts. The articles throughout this issue of *JSD* will help to develop deeper understandings of these concepts.

APPLY LEARNING THEORIES, RESEARCH, AND MODELS

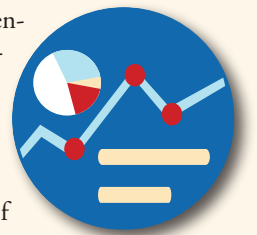
Educators, through both planning and practice, continually explore how students learn best, and the answers are different for each student. The same level of inquiry is

necessary for adult learning. Educators consider elements that best support adult learners and use their understanding of learning models to shape valuable learning experiences.

“Student learning is developmental, and educators know that effectively supporting that learning should take into account the way a student learns and the way that learning changes over time. The complex, developmental nature of learning is easily accepted when educators think about students, but this same idea is often overlooked when they consider the learning needed to improve their own practice. Adult learning is also developmental” (Fahey & Ippolito, p. 32).

“With the exponential rate of innovation, and the creation of websites, apps, and devices, roles are changing. The person whose disposition is to be curious, confident, and eager to try something new, explore, engage, and try again learns what is needed to teach and lead regardless of age or position” (Gullen & Sheldon, p. 36).

“Why are critical thinking and metacognition important to professional learning? Research and personal ex-

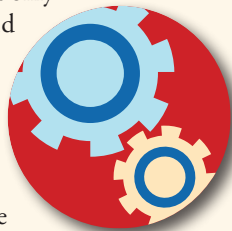


perience have shown that when educators are engaged in critical thinking about the process of learning, they are empowered to take ownership of their learning. Whether in the classroom or in everyday life, this type of thinking creates a sustainable, ongoing process that promotes metacognition” (Donnelly & Linn, p. 42).

“How do we move novice educators from the initiation stage to proficiency? ... Are there strategies that we can use to facilitate and accelerate the transition? Can these strategies be employed for aspiring and novice principals? Will the same strategies that help aspiring and novice leaders help other aspiring or novice educators in various roles? Can we develop a process to intervene early for those at risk and get them back on track before they fail?” (Carlson, Harsy, & Karas, p. 51).

SELECT LEARNING DESIGNS

Professional learning leaders not only understand how adults learn and multiple appropriate models, but also know how to select a learn design appropriately. The learning design supports specific learning goals and advances learners from accessing information to knowledge application.



“... [P]latforms for professional learning must engage educators in purposeful collaboration with a community of learners designed to meet not only individual learning goals, but also those of teams, schools, districts, and programs” (Killion & Treacy, p. 16).

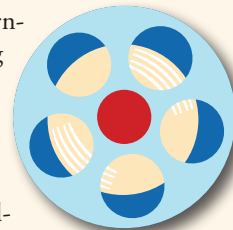
“During Teacher Rounds, teachers teach individual lessons while other teachers in their rounds group observe. Through rounds, more experienced practitioners can pass on knowledge and experience to the less experienced. There are opportunities for both veteran and novice teachers to learn, and those opportunities are encouraged. The teachers — one of whom is the group’s facilitator — are in control of the process of observing, analyzing, learning, and making a strategic commitment to change their practice based on what they have learned” (Troen & Boles, pp. 20-21).

“Nothing is more frustrating than participating in professional development that doesn’t support learning. Therefore, when educators begin to plan both short- and long-term professional learning, they must begin by asking the same critical questions that they want teachers to ask their students:

- What do we want participants to learn?
- What are the purposes of this learning?
- How will I model for my learners?
- How will I know they understand?” (Donnelly & Linn, p. 42).

PROMOTE ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Adults actively engaged in learning take responsibility for shaping their own growth and are able to authentically apply what they learn. As active learners, adults interact with the content and with other learners, collaborating for collective growth that impacts all students.



“Change in professional practice begins with knowledge and ends when the educator thoroughly analyzes available resources, contemplates how to adapt them to his or her unique circumstance, makes those adaptations, applies the adaptations in practice, and reflects on the effectiveness of the practice in terms of benefits for students” (Killion & Treacy, p. 14).

“However, content knowledge as well as practical knowledge, good judgment, expertise, and accumulated wisdom in schools is often confined to the classroom of the teacher who possesses that knowledge, wisdom, and expertise. To become better places for adults to learn, some schools intentionally become places where educators learn with and from one another. These schools develop a socializing learning practice” (Fahey & Ippolito, p. 34).

“Deepening the level of cognitive demand by applying, integrating, and communicating what we have learned to authentic real-world situations is essential” (Gullen & Sheldon, p. 37). ■