



The pause that refreshes

I recently learned about a “20-20-20” rule for reducing eyestrain caused by spending too much time in front of a computer screen: Every 20 minutes, take 20 seconds to look at a point at least 20 feet away. As someone who buries my nose in a laptop for hours at a time, I found this in some ways very reasonable and simple, and in other ways ridiculous. I’ve barely dug in deep to some good writing after 20 minutes. Who wants to stop then?

However, as I practice this exercise, I notice an added benefit. When the timer goes off and I look into the mid-distance, something is happening in my brain. When I pause, I consider what I’m doing in new ways. I return to the information in front of me with a different perspective.

The 20-20-20 exercise is one I’d like to adapt as we think about what our brains need to learn. When we barrel ahead bringing in new information, whether it’s with other adults, challenging content, new teaching strategies, or a new software program, we’re putting a lot of strain on our brains. If we don’t take a moment to look up, take a deep breath, and consider where new information fits in with what we know already, we risk losing all sense of how to use that new information to grow.

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This notion aligns with research that stresses the importance of reflection in learning, not to mention the other elements of supporting learning in ways that lead to changed practice, such as ongoing follow-up, coaching, and opportunities for practice.

Taking time to pause and reflect isn’t automatic for educators. There are too many demands during the day and too much other ground to cover during other times. Yet it’s too important to skip. These are minutes where learners make meaning of what they’ve heard.

For summer, when some of the burdens on educators are a bit lighter, let’s think about our own 20-20-20 rules for supporting learning. For some, it could be as simple as this: For every 20 minutes of formal learning, build in 20 minutes of follow-up and 20 minutes of reflection and analysis. Others might take a different tack: Every 20 minutes of reading is best

supported by 20 minutes of discussion and 20 seconds of tweeting. Perhaps learning communities can adapt their own 20-20-20 rule to balance new information with reflection and analysis.

In addition to considering how to plan reflection time, let’s also use summer to take a deep breath. On page 8, where Learning Forward Director of Learning Carol François writes about using summer for learning, we include questions to guide your learning plan.

A key step in looking ahead is looking back. What worked this year? In your learning, what resonates most loudly today? Where do you need to dig deeper to compound your understanding for next year’s challenges? And, most important, how can you build in a reflection step for each new learning challenge you encounter next year? ■