



Educators can learn a few things from Google

As we use this issue of *JSD* to offer inspiration and ideas to fuel summer learning, I'm trying one of my favorite tactics to open my eyes to new perspectives — looking beyond education. Recently I heard Steven Butschi, from Google Education, talk about developing organizational strategies to help schools and their leaders deal with change.

Butschi spoke of the need to innovate new schools and classrooms to replace the traditional schoolhouse, where educators use the same materials, at the same time, in fixed locations. I agree with his premise. We have encountered transformational change in almost every aspect of our lives, yet schools are slow to follow. If educators are serious about preparing students to be college- and career-ready, then we need to get serious about design changes.

After I heard the speech, I wanted to know more about how Google changed its business practices to create one of the most desirable and innovative working cultures in the world. So I Googled, “What’s it like to work at Google?” The Googleplex, I learned, is the ultimate fantasy in building design. An array of sporting and exercise amenities and other employee perks, such as free food and free transportation, create an Oz-like atmosphere for Google employees.

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Internet cafes and conference rooms abound, each designed to encourage interactions between Googlers within and across internal and international teams. In the Googleplex, everyone is considered a hands-on contributor of ideas and opinions. Belief statements such as “Focus on the user and all else will follow” and “You don’t need to be at your desk to need an answer” ground Google as the ultimate innovative corporation (Google, n.d; Ulanoff, 2009).

How does Google provide professional learning? A *Fast Company* article describes one of the company’s most successful internal training programs, Googler-to-Googler. The program is designed to help employees with excellent technical backgrounds develop top-notch presentation and communication skills. Why? The greatest reward for Googler-to-Googler trainers is, they believe, understanding the impact they have on others, the importance of group collaboration, and the significant need to cultivate motivation (Kessler, 2013).

Schools and their leaders should take a lesson here. Schools deserve a new culture of expectations. While some aspects of the total Google experience may be a stretch for public schools, I’m still contemplating

Butschi’s challenge to reimagine education:

- What if we could let go of the traditional schoolhouse?
- What if all teachers and students could become hands-on contributors of ideas and opinions?
- What if schools could purposefully design education to develop global problem solvers and risk takers that could change the world?
- What if the ultimate focus of professional learning could nurture an understanding of our impact on others, the importance of collaboration, and motivation?

What if we really could “Googlize” education? That’s what I’ll be pondering this summer as I develop new ideas for the educators with whom I work.

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