PROFESSIONAL LEARNING DESIGNS

GENERAL

Action research

Case discussions

Coaching and online coaching

Curriculum, instruction, and assessment

Data analysis

Dialogue and visual dialogue

Gaming

Innovation incubators

Lesson study

Massive open online courses

Online courses

Portfolios and digital portfolios

Professional learning communities

Protocols and online protocols

Rounds, walk-throughs, and shadowing

Simulations

Teacher-led conferences

SPECIFIC

Collaborative Analysis of Student Learning (CASL)

edWeb.net

Eduplanet21

Learning School Alliance
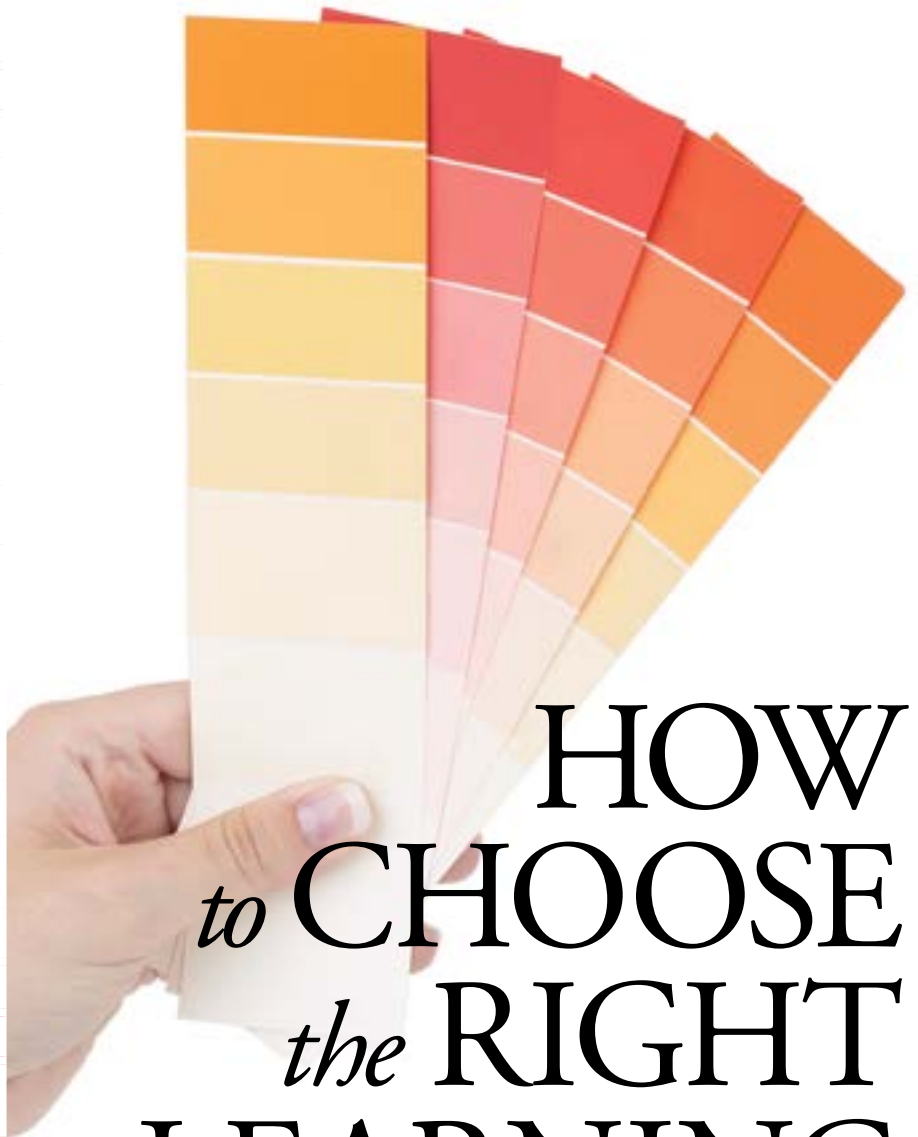
Literacy Design Collaborative

PD 360

Project-based learning

Project Zero & Visible Thinking

Success at the Core

Teaching Channel

Teachscape

HOW *to* CHOOSE *the* RIGHT LEARNING DESIGN

These 27 professional learning designs were studied by Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership with Learning Forward to determine the "how" of professional learning construction.

By Lois Brown Easton and Terry Morganti-Fisher

The recent proliferation of online learning designs — such as edWeb, PD 360, or Teaching Channel — presents a challenge: How can professional learning leaders decide which designs will be the most effective?

Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning are immediately helpful. The backmapping model that Joellen Killion and Patricia Roy shared in *Becoming a Learning School* (Killion & Roy, 2009) offers insight into how to choose an appropriate design.

In addition, a recent joint project of Learning Forward and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership provides a way to think about developing, enhancing, and evaluating professional learning designs.

Finally, the third edition of *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning* (Easton, in press) presents 24 designs. While a few of these are updated versions from previous editions, most are new designs, often technology-based. The designs in this edition, which is scheduled for publication this winter, have shown their effectiveness over time with a wide variety of users.

HOW LEARNING HAPPENS

A first step in considering how to shape professional learning is to understand the fundamentals of what makes learning meaningful to adults. The Learning Designs standard from the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) outlines the key elements of effective professional learning. The standard 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.

The key phrases are *integrates theories, research, and models of human learning* and *intended outcomes*.

Adult learning theory is one of the most important sources of information about what works in terms of professional learning. Jane Vella, in her book *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults* (1994), provides a comprehensive description of adult learning preferences. Here is a summary:

1. Needs assessment: Participation of the learners in naming what is to be learned;
2. Safety in the environment and the process;
3. A sound relationship between teacher and learner for learning and development;
4. Careful attention to sequence of content and reinforcement;
5. Praxis: Action with reflection or learning by doing;
6. Respect for learners as subjects of their own learning;
7. Cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects: Ideas, feelings, actions;
8. Immediacy of the learning;
9. Clear roles and role development;
10. Teamwork: Using small groups;
11. Engagement of the learners in what they are learning; and
12. Accountability: How do they know they know (pp. 3-4).

Think how valuable professional learning would be if it exemplified these characteristics. Integrate this theory with brain-based research, and you have an even more powerful formula for effective professional learning.

David Sousa, in an *Educational Leadership* article, suggests, "The brain's biological mechanisms responsible for learning and remembering are roughly the same for learners of different ages. However, the efficiency of these mechanisms varies with the degree of development of the brain regions involved (Shaw et al., 2006). Emotional and social factors and past experiences also enter into play in terms of the brain's efficiency and an individual learner's motivation. Because these factors are more developed in adults than in children, they have greater influence over adults than they have over children" (Sousa, 2009).

Integrating a well-accepted model of human learning raises the power of this standard. Social constructivism is one such model. Notice how its precepts integrate with the theory of adult learning and research on the brain.

Key assumptions of this perspective include:

1. What the learner currently believes, whether correct or incorrect, is important.
2. Despite having the same learning experience, individuals will base their learning on the understanding and meaning personal to them.
3. Understanding or constructing meaning is an active and continuous process.
4. Learning may involve some conceptual changes.
5. When learners construct a new meaning, they may not believe it but may give it provisional acceptance or even rejection.
6. Learning is an active, not passive, process and depends on the learners taking responsibility to learn (adapted from University College Dublin Open Educational Resources, n.d.).

A PLANNING MODEL

Joellen Killion and Patricia Roy's backmapping model for planning professional learning (see diagram on this page) essentially begins and ends with students. Thus it is attentive to the second essential phrase in the Learning Design standard: *intended outcomes.*
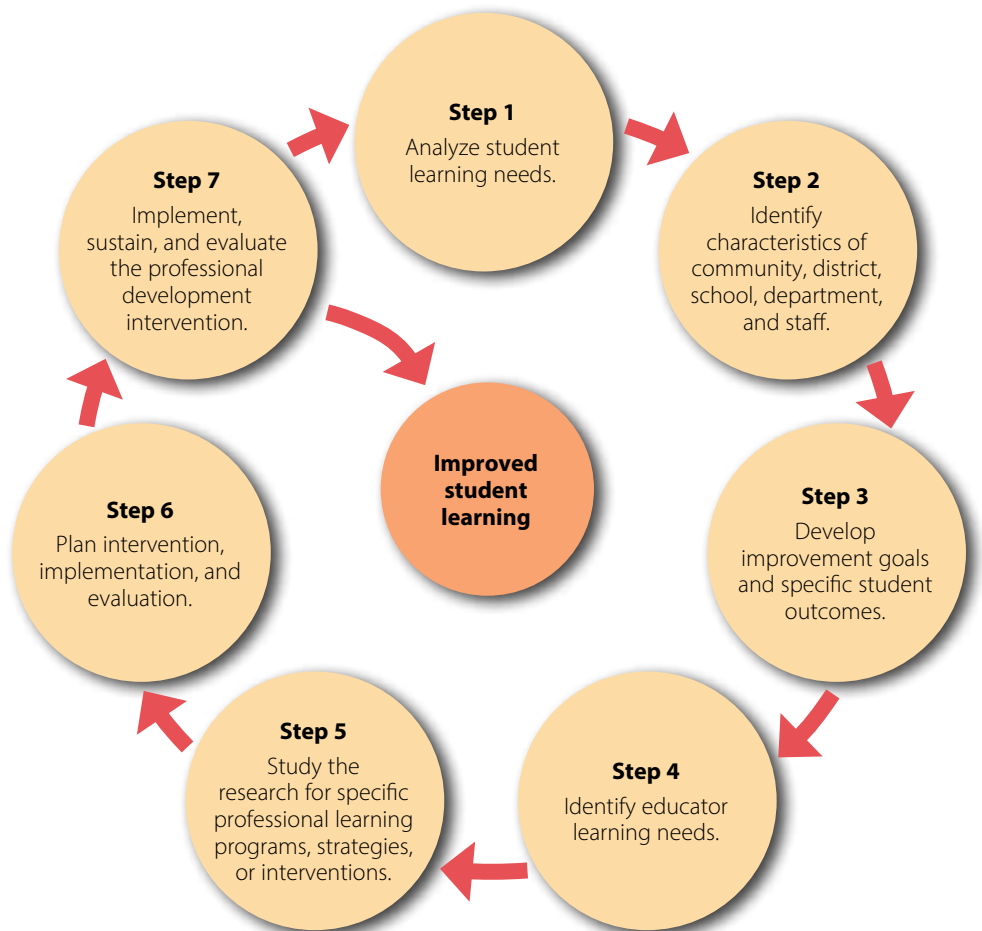
In this model, a learning design achieves purpose when leaders analyze student learning needs (Step 1). In Step 2, they consider the environment of the learning. They develop learning needs into improvement goals and specific student outcomes in Step 3.

From these, they identify educator learning needs in Step 4. In Step 5, leaders study the theory, research, and models already discussed in this article. In Steps 6 and 7, they implement the design and make changes to enhance student learning which is, of course, the desired destination of this cycle, which can be repeated as needs change.

A MODEL THAT SHARPENS THE FOCUS

In 2013, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) asked to collaborate with Learning Forward to investigate the key elements of effective professional learning

BACKMAPPING MODEL FOR PLANNING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Step 1
Analyze student learning needs.

Step 2
Identify characteristics of community, district, school, department, and staff.

Step 3
Develop improvement goals and specific student outcomes.

Step 4
Identify educator learning needs.

Step 5
Study the research for specific professional learning programs, strategies, or interventions.

Step 6
Plan intervention, implementation, and evaluation.

Step 7
Implement, sustain, and evaluate the professional development intervention.

Improved student learning

Source: Killion & Roy, 2009. Used with permission.

design — more specifically, "to give greater guidance around the 'how' of professional learning construction" (AITSL, 2014, p. 2).

This model builds on the Learning Designs standard. With theories, research, and models of professional learning in mind, the authors of this article — working with AITSL — crafted a simple logic sequence: Within a particular context, educators will engage in learning that will result in implementation of new practices, leading to successful learners.

They then investigated more than 50 professional learning designs. They narrowed the designs they studied to 27. (See the list on p. 10.) Many professional learning designs — such as action research, professional learning communities, and lesson study — have substantial research to support their effectiveness. Others, especially new technology-based designs such as Eduplanet21, Success at the Core, and Teachscape, are just beginning to collect research that attests to their value.

The authors scrutinized the 27 designs, teasing out the factors that made them effective according to research or acclaim. They identified a set of elements that seemed to cut across the

AITSL MODEL FOR LEARNING
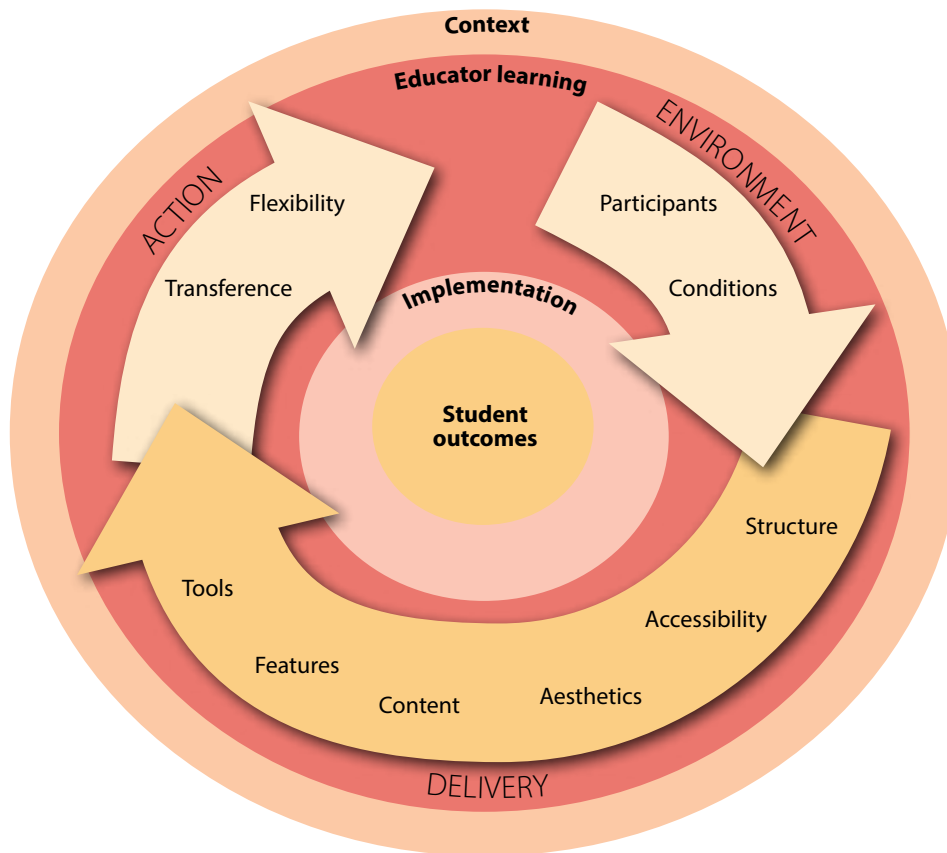
Source: AITSL, 2014, p. 6. Used with permission.

designs and organized these into three major components: environment, delivery, and action. (See graphic above.)

In this model, the environment component focuses on participants and conditions, roughly corresponding to Step 2 of Killion & Roy's backmapping model. With purpose in mind, professional learning leaders can concentrate on the context or the environment of the learners.

The focus of this model really sharpens in terms of analysis of designs themselves in the delivery component. Within this component, they are encouraged to focus on the elements of structure, accessibility, aesthetics, content, features, and tools. Here are quick definitions of these elements:

Structure is "concerned with the practical arrangements of learning, i.e. the amount of time it takes and decisions about location and sequence of events" (AITSL, 2014, p. 10). Context and purposes for learning usually drive decisions about structure.

Accessibility refers to the ease with which the learner can engage in the design. Accessible learning design is based on strategies that enable the user to participate without difficulty.

Aesthetics "refers to those aspects of a learning design that elicit a sensory response from the participant. Aesthetic choices within a learning design include decisions about the visual,

auditory, and physical construction of the professional learning that enable engagement with the learning" (p. 10).

Content refers to the knowledge, attitude, skills, aspirations, and behaviors (Killion, 2008) that educators will work on through professional learning. Content may be subject-area specific or related to pedagogical, personal, or professional knowledge or practice. Alignment between content, purpose, and context is critical.

Features "are the practices associated with the delivery of, or mode of participation in, professional learning" (AITSL, 2014, p. 11). Choice of features depends on the purposes of the learning, the nature of the activities, the participants' contexts, and conditions such as time and access to experts.

Tools are "instruments used to enhance knowledge transfer, deepen engagement, and support understanding of content aims" (AITSL, 2014, p. 11). They encourage the learner to test and apply his or her understanding as an active participant in the professional learning through activity, interaction, collaboration, application, or review (AITSL, 2014, p. 11).

The third component, action, "refers to those aspects leading to implementation of learning, translating learning to practice" (AITSL, 2014, p. 18).

Effective designs are likely to help learners engage in integrated and iterative professional learning such as "collaborative problem-solving, inquiry and research projects, peer observation, and feedback programs" (AITSL, 2014, p. 18).

Transference and flexibility are key considerations for this component. Transference is about "the ease with which participants transfer new knowledge and understanding, implementing their learning" (AITSL, 2014, p. 18). Sustaining implementation is key to effective use of a design.

Flexibility means a design is "broad enough to provide professional learning for a variety of situations. It will support educators to link their learning to changes in the classroom or school and implement new learnings, perhaps even in a different way to what was originally intended" (AITSL, 2014, p. 18).

The publication *Designing Professional Learning* (AITSL, 2014) features thorough descriptions of these components and elements as well as examples of designs for many of them. A series of questions helps professional learning leaders consider which designs would be appropriate for developing, enhancing, and evaluating professional learning.
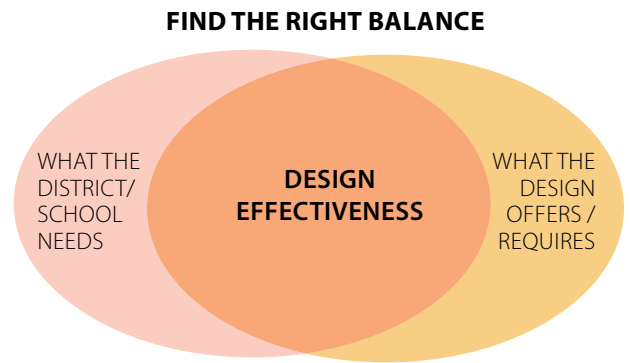
POWERFUL DESIGNS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Together with the first and second editions of *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning*, the third edition provides a directory of designs that educators around the country have found effective for professional learning. See below for a list of the designs included in the third edition.

The third edition grounds the learning designs within a meaningful context — that is, helping readers to understand not just the specific characteristics of powerful learning strategies, but also the systems in which such professional learning can thrive.

It isn't enough for professional learning designs to address the right criteria. In a coherent system, everyone involved shares an understanding of the role professional learning plays in advancing school purposes, their responsibilities for supporting professional learning, and the time and resources required. Those who work in such a coherent system contribute daily to an ongoing culture of continuous learning.

PULLING THE CRITERIA TOGETHER

So, finally, what matters in terms of selecting powerful professional learning designs? Here, presented as a set of questions,

FIND THE RIGHT BALANCE

POWERFUL DESIGNS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, 3rd edition

Introduction: Design: Lois Brown Easton

Introduction: Systems: Lois Brown Easton and Ann Delehant

Accessing student voices: Kathleen Cushman

Action research: Cathy Caro-Bruce and Mary Klehr

Assessment as professional learning: Jay McTighe and Marcella Emberger

Classroom walk-throughs: Carolyn Downey

Coaching principals: Kay Psencik

Collaborative assessment of student learning: Georgea M. Langer and Amy B. Colton

Critical friends groups: Stevi Quate

Curriculum as professional learning: Eleanor Dougherty, Stacy Galiatsos, and Anne Lewis

Data analysis: Victoria Bernhardt

Dialogue: Oscar Graybill

Digital teacher portfolios: David Niguidula

Instructional coaching: Chris Bryan, Heather Clifton, and Cindy Harrison

Instructional rounds: Lee Teitel

Lesson study: Catherine Lewis

Online coaching: Joellen Killion

Online courses: John Ross

Online protocols: Alan Dichter and Janet Zydney

Professional learning communities: Lois Brown Easton

Shadowing: Michael Soguero, Dan Condon, and Colin Packard

Social media: Lyn Hilt

Teacher-led conference: Matt Esterman and Cameron Paterson

Videos: Pat Wasley

Visual dialogue: Suzanne Bailey and Lois Brown Easton

Webinars: Tom Manning

are criteria for selecting designs according to the standard, theories, research, and models:

- Does the design exemplify accepted research and theory (e.g. adult learning, brain-based research, and social constructivism)?
- Does the design help educators fulfill their purpose for professional learning, based on student needs and desired student outcomes?
- Does the design fit the needs of the environment? What are the needs of the participants? What are the conditions for adult learning?
- Do the elements of the design lead to participant learning and application of learning?
- Is the structure (who, what, when, where, why, and how) suitable? Can it be altered to suit without destroying the integrity of the design?
- Is the design accessible, whether face-to-face, online, or blended?
- Is the design aesthetic, that is, likely to have a positive effect on participants?
- Is the content the right content for the purpose, the participants, and the context?
- How well do the features of the design — the processes — encourage deep learning and implementation?
- How well do the tools help adults learn?
- How well does the design encourage implementation or action as a result of learning? In particular, does the design include activities that help participants transfer and apply their learning?
- How does the design help participants evaluate their own learning and apply it in new contexts?

NO DESIGN IS PERFECT

The number of good professional learning designs available to educational leaders has multiplied in the last 10 years, especially through the use of technology. Choosing the right design requires understanding and balancing context needs with what a design offers and requires. The diagram above offers a way of looking at design choices.

REFERENCES

City, E.A., Elmore, R.F., Fiarman, S.E., & Teitel, L. (2009). *Instructional rounds in education: A network approach to improving teaching and learning.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Copland, M.A. & Knapp, M.S. (2006). *Connecting leadership with learning: A framework for reflection, planning, and action.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Darling-Hammond, L. & McLaughlin, M. (1996). Teacher education around the world: What can we learn from international practice? In L. Darling-Hammond & A. Lieberman (Eds.), *Teacher education around the world* (p. 203.) New York, NY: Routledge.

Fink, S. & Markholt, A. (2011). *Leading for instructional improvement: How successful leaders develop teaching and learning expertise.* San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.

Haycock, K. (1998, Summer). Good teaching matters: How well-qualified teachers can close the gap. *Thinking K-16, 3*(2), 1-2.

Honig, M.I. (2008). District central offices as learning organizations: How sociocultural and organizational learning theories elaborate district central office administrators' participation in teaching and learning improvement efforts. *American Journal of Education, 114*(4), 627-664.

Leithwood, K., Louis, K.S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning.* New York, NY: The Wallace Foundation.

Peske, H.G. & Haycock, K. (2006). *Teaching inequality: How poor and minority students are shortchanged on teacher quality.* Washington, DC: The Education Trust.

Rowan, B., Correnti, R., & Miller, R.J. (2002). What large-scale survey research tells us about teacher effects on student achievement: Insights from the Prospects study of elementary schools. *Teachers College Record, 104*(8), 1525-1567.

Wahlstrom, K., Louis, K.S., Leithwood, K., & Anderson, S. (2010). *Investigating the links to improved student learning.* New York, NY: The Wallace Foundation.

•

Patty Maxfield (pamax@u.washington.edu) is director of teacher evaluation and Sharon Williams (swill7@uw.edu) is project director of instructional leadership in the Center for Educational Leadership at University of Washington. ■

How to choose the right learning design

Continued from p.16

A design must be flexible enough to fit the needs of the district or school without compromising its integrity. At the same time, since no design is perfect and can fill *all* the professional learning needs of *everyone,* schools and districts need to think about how they will supplement the design with their own devices.

For example, a school or district may decide that a design is somewhat weak on implementation and, therefore, decide to establish a coaching program to be sure that educators apply what they are learning through the design.

One approach to this reality is to think of *design* as plural. It may take multiple designs — coordinated as a program — to fulfill the needs of the organization, its personnel, and its students.

REFERENCES

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). (2014). *Designing professional learning.* Melbourne, Australia: AITSL. Available at www.aitsl.edu.au/professional-growth/research/designing-professional-learning.

Easton, L.B. (Ed.). (In press.) *Powerful designs for professional learning* (3rd ed.). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

Killion, J. (2008). *Assessing impact: Evaluating staff development.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Killion, J. & Roy, P. (2009). *Becoming a learning school.* Oxford, OH: NSDC.

Learning Forward. (2011). *Standards for Professional Learning.* Oxford, OH: Author.

Shaw, P., Greenstein, D., Lerch, I., Clasen, L., Lenroot, R., & Gotay, N. (2006). Intellectual ability and cortical development in children and adolescents. *Nature, 440*(7084), 676-679.

Sousa, D. (2009, June). Brain-friendly learning for teachers. *Educational Leadership, 66.* Available at www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/summer09/vol66/num09/Brain-Friendly_Learning_for_Teachers.aspx.

University College Dublin Open Educational Resources. (n.d.). *Education theory: Constructivism and social constructivism in the classroom.* Available at www.ucdoer.ie/index.php?title=Education_theory/Constructivism_and_Social_Constructivism_in_the_Classroom&oldid=2478.

Vella, J. (1994). *Learning to listen, learning to teach.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

•

Lois Brown Easton (leastoners@aol.com) and Terry Morganti-Fisher (tmorgantifisher@gmail.com) are senior consultants for Learning Forward's Center for Results. Learning Forward Senior Advisor Joellen Killion (joellen.killion@learningforward.org) also contributed to this article. ■