



BRAINSTORMERS WELCOME

By Tracy Crow

For the second year in a row, we're excited to use *JSD* to highlight insights, thought leaders, and promising work in progress in the field that will also be featured at Learning Forward's Annual Conference. We call this issue the Idea Lab because, like our conference, we intend for this issue to be a starting point to launch readers and learners into exploring ideas. While there is often overlap between the educators and writers we feature in *JSD* and the conference, this issue is a special opportunity to put session facilitators front and center in the magazine.

We know that not every reader of *JSD* can attend our conference, yet that doesn't mean readers need to miss out on all of the information available through the face-to-face event. Our intention is to share valuable information via every forum to help learners find new

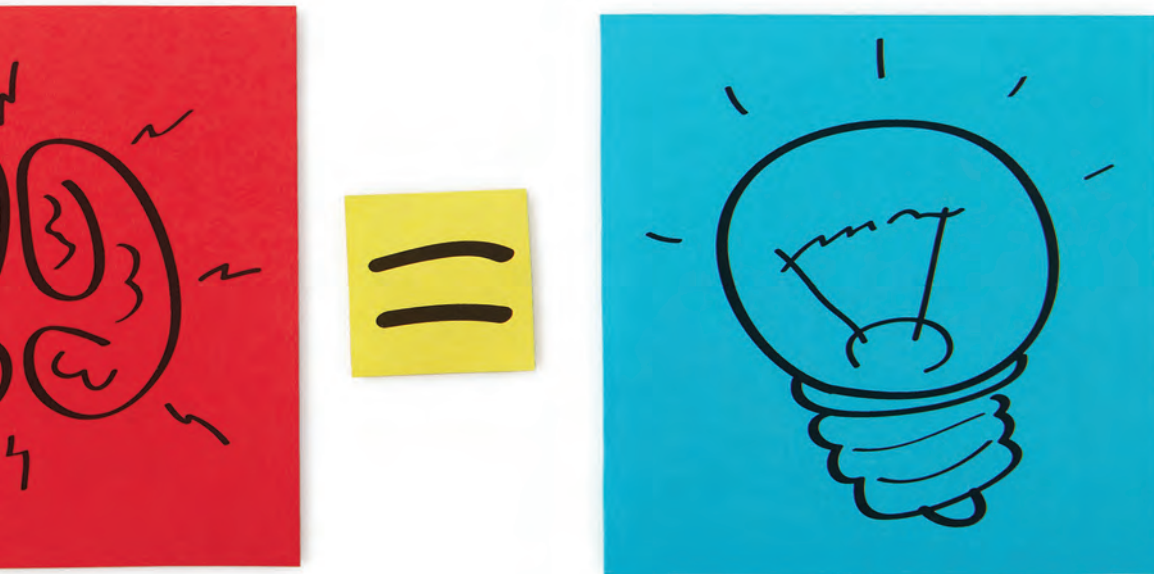
ideas wherever and whenever they most need them.

Whether learners are flipping through a magazine, browsing new titles on e-readers, scanning conference session options, or sampling TED talks, what place do new ideas have in improving practice? How do educators move from interest to inspiration to integration?

PLAN TO LEARN ...

No matter the source and forum for new ideas, busy adult learners enter any learning opportunity with at least some sense of what they most need to know to strengthen their capacity to serve students. When they have skills and structures to plan even more carefully, educators analyze student data, often collaboratively, to understand specifically what they need to know and be able to do to improve instruction.

With deliberate goal setting based on multiple sources of data, educators can more precisely pinpoint information sources to locate what they need to learn.



They can go idea shopping, so to speak, with a detailed list, ignoring the options that don't meet their specific needs to get to the information that fits previously determined criteria.

... AND ALSO MAKE WAY FOR INSPIRATION

Searching for information with too much precision, however, can put learners in a position to miss out on the aha moments they need to motivate them to learn more or push their practice to a higher level. Learners maintain an ideal balancing act when they can understand their own learning needs deeply at the same time that they remain open to possibilities for inspiration from unexpected sources.

For example, a principal searching for information about effective frequent teacher observations might have identified the need to understand strategies and structures to drop into classrooms frequently and use those visits to talk meaningfully and specifically with teachers about instruction. When she leafs through an issue of a management magazine in her dentist's waiting room, she gets even more inspiration from an article on body language and communication style that will help her better implement some of the new classroom visit strategies.

... AND CREATE TIME FOR REFLECTION AND PRACTICE

A constant barrage of information, no matter how directly relevant, well-presented, timely, or motivational,

won't have an impact for educators if they don't have time to do more than take it in. To transform information into knowledge, learners need opportunities to unpack information in various ways, perhaps in partnership with colleagues, a learning team, or a coach.

This step may include a range of activities, from discussion to writing to practicing particular strategies to examining how the new skills or practices are working with students or other learners. Learners may realize at this stage that they need still more sources of information on a particular topic, so they add to their idea shopping list and keep up their search.

... TO KEEP THE CYCLE GOING

Learning is continuous. No matter how much they strengthen their skills and fill their toolboxes, educators stretch and grow constantly over the course of their careers. Not only do they encounter new challenges with other educators, students, new standards, and shifting demands, educators also strive to achieve higher levels of mastery in areas where they already have significant expertise. When they find themselves in cultures and contexts where the stream of ideas never stops flowing, educators — the ultimate learners — will thrive and help others to thrive.

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