USE A VARIETY OF PRACTICES TO CONNECT WITH ALL

Cognitive psychologists, neuroscientists, and educators have studied how learning occurs for nearly a century. The resulting theories, research, and models of human learning shape the underlying framework and assumptions educators use to plan and design professional learning. While multiple designs exist, many have common features …

— Learning Forward, 2011, p. 40

By Eleanor Drago-Severson

Eleanor Drago-Severson's research, writing, teaching, and coaching has helped show that supporting adult learning and professional development improves outcomes for students. Given the mounting adaptive challenges educators face in education today, teachers and school leaders must continuously learn and grow as they manage these tremendously complex issues and programs and the ambiguity inherent in them. Drago-Severson's full essay explains how the Learning Designs standard helps educators prioritize these designs, as well as understand how to effectively support learning and improvement.

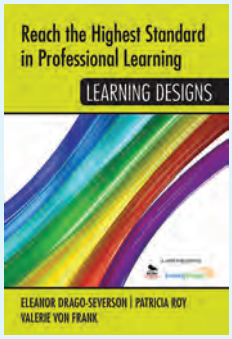
The full essay looks at the three "big ideas," or strands, that comprise the Learning Designs standard. In this excerpt, she examines the first strand, which concerns the way learning theories, research, and models help us understand the adults we want to support.

The first strand of the Learning Designs standard focuses on the underlying beliefs and values that drive professional learning and the common features of robust learning environments that are informed by theories, research, and models. For example, the strand names "active engagement, modeling, reflection, metacognition, application, feedback, ongoing support, and formative and summative assessment" as key components of effective learning designs (Learning Forward, 2011, p. 40).

These are all very important. My approach and perspective have been informed and enriched primarily by constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000), a neo-Piagetian theory of adult development created by Harvard psychologist Robert Kegan. Kegan's theory sheds light on how adults make meaning at a given point and over time and how our ways of knowing can stretch and grow to be more complex if we are offered developmentally appropriate supports and challenges. While there is great promise in this premise in general — that adulthood can be a time of robust personal development rather than a fixed end-point — it is also particularly important for professional learning design.

Understanding that adults have different ways of knowing — or ways of tak-

Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students **integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.**



ABOUT THE BOOK

Drago-Severson, E., Roy, P., & von Frank, V. (2015). *Reach the highest standard in professional learning: Learning Designs.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. Excerpted with permission.

ing things in, making sense of them, and putting them together — reminds us that we need to employ a variety of pedagogical practices when facilitating professional learning. Doing so enables us to adequately meet adult learners — who have different ways of understanding their experiences — where they are (i.e. support) and offer developmentally appropriate challenges or stretching (in a psychological sense) to support their learning and growth. What feels like a good fit pedagogically for one learner might feel overly challenging for another, so paying careful attention to the fit and the expectations we convey in designing learning opportunities can make a big difference for educators and for schools.

To provide a little more context, it might be helpful to understand that constructive-developmental theory is based on three central principles: constructivism, developmentalism, and what is referred to as the subject-object balance or meaning-making system.

Constructivism, the first principle, sheds light on the fact that human beings actively construct or make sense of experiences every minute of every day. How we interpret what we see

and hear and experience is qualitatively different from person to person and has a big influence on our understandings and perspectives.

The second principle, *developmentalism*, highlights the promising notion that the way we make meaning of our experiences can become bigger and more encompassing over time — that we can, in fact, continue to develop and grow throughout the lifespan. Professional learning environments can help us to do this.

The third major principle is what Kegan (1982) refers to as the *subject-object balance*. A person's way of knowing or meaning-making system hinges on this balance. This system centers on the relationship between what we can have a perspective on and control (object) and what we cannot see about ourselves or others (subject). The more perspective we can have on ourselves, others, and our relationships, the better we are able to manage complexity and also give back to others.

While Kegan's (1982, 1994, 2000; Kegan et al., 2001) constructive-developmental theory is composed of six qualitatively different stages or meaning-making systems, research suggests that adults today most commonly make meaning with one of three ways of knowing, which I refer to as the instrumental, socializing, or self-authoring (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012).

Like other, more recognized forms of diversity, one's way of knowing is an important facet of who one is at any given point in time. A person's way of knowing dictates and shapes beliefs about what constitutes effective help, successful practice, good teaching, effective leadership, and the necessary supports and challenges in order to learn and grow.

Moreover, a person's way of knowing is not random. Rather, it is stable and consistent for a period of time and reflects a coherent system of logic. While context matters, a way of knowing might feel more like the way we are rather than something we have (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2012; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013; Kegan, 1982, 1994).

A developmental approach to designing and facilitating professional learning takes into account adults' different ways of knowing. Thus it helps us to shape learning experiences to be safe and productive "holding environments" (Kegan, 1982, p. 115) that support educators with different orientations — or ways of knowing — and expectations.

The concept of a holding environment was first described in the 1960s by pediatrician and psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott. Kegan later used the term in his theory of adult development and maintained that we all need multiple forms of "holding" throughout our lives. His theory highlights that we must benefit from differentiated forms of holding — meaning support, nourishment, and care — in order to grow. Kegan's (1982) work extends Winnicott's (1965) definition of a holding environment to include the kinds of environments and relationships that provide opportunities for personal growth throughout the lifespan.

ELEANOR DRAGO-SEVERSON is a professor of education leadership and adult learning & leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her work explores the promise of practices that support adult development, leadership development, and capacity building within schools and districts as well as across school systems.

To better understand how to think about and shape these kinds of holding environments in designing professional learning for educators, let's examine the three most common ways of knowing in adulthood — the instrumental, socializing, and self-authoring — as well as strategies for supporting and stretching (in the developmental sense) adults with different ways of knowing independently and collectively.

Before turning to these ways of knowing, however, it is important to remember a few important facts. First, development is not the same as intelligence. A person can be very intelligent — as well as kind and caring — and make meaning with any one of the three ways of knowing. Second, each way of knowing has developmental strengths and limitations. Last, a particular way of knowing is not necessarily better than another. Rather, it depends on the fit between personal (internal) capacities and environmental demands.

That said, the demands of contemporary education, and especially the adaptive challenges that we encounter every day, are calling for greater internal capacities. Therefore, designing learning experiences that help adults to understand, identify, and expand their ways of knowing is one promising way to improve schools and school systems together.

THE INSTRUMENTAL WAY OF KNOWING

Educators — and all adults, for that matter — who make meaning with an instrumental way of knowing have a "what do you have that can help me; what do I have that can help you" orientation to work, teaching, learning, relationships, and the world. Instrumental knowers understand that observable events have realities separate from their own but generally understand the world in very concrete (dualistic) terms.

Instrumental knowers orient strongly toward rule following and feel supported when others provide specific, explicit advice to help them navigate decisions and responsibilities. These knowers can be caring and loving — though in a concrete manner. A limitation to this way of knowing is the inability to take others' perspectives fully.

To best support and challenge these knowers, professional learning needs to offer a deliberate balance of clear structure and safe, collaborative opportunities and chances to look beyond the "one right way" of doing things and consider multiple perspectives and multiple alternative solutions.

THE SOCIALIZING WAY OF KNOWING

Educators with a socializing way of knowing have more complex (internal) developmental capacities for reflection and the capacity to consider and reflect on other people's perspectives and actions. Unlike instrumental knowers, socializing knowers can think abstractly (in the psychological sense rather than the mathematical sense). Their orientation is other-focused, and such adults often subordinate their own needs to those of others.

Interpersonal conflict is almost always experienced as a threat to the self, and acceptance by authorities and/or valued others is of the highest importance. When supporting the growth of socializing knowers, professional learning facilitators can create opportunities for these adults to voice their own opinions before adopting those of valued others.

Often, it is helpful to invite and encourage socializing knowers to share their perspectives in pairs or small groups before large-group discussions. This helps them clarify their own beliefs, values, and standards before addressing a larger audience.

THE SELF-AUTHORING WAY OF KNOWING

Adults with a self-authoring way of knowing generate their own internal value systems and author their own standards (Drago-Severson, 2006a, 2006b, 2007). They can identify abstract values, principles, and longer-term purposes and are able to prioritize and integrate competing values.

These knowers can assess other people's expectations, standards, and judgments and compare them to their own. They have the capacity to reflect on and regulate interpersonal relationships but are not able to have perspective on their own self-system (ideology) because they are so closely identified with it.

Like other adults, educators with a self-authoring way of knowing can be both supported and challenged through professional learning. While they will likely welcome opportunities to lead or express their values and beliefs, they can also benefit from gentle challenges to let go of their own perspectives and embrace opposing points of view.

DIFFERENTIATION AND DIVERSITY

Strategies that take into account these three concepts can be built into any of the four pillar practices for growth — teaming, providing adults with leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring — that can help make professional learning initiatives become developmental holding environments for adults with different ways of knowing.

It might be helpful to think about what it means — from a developmental perspective — to give and receive feedback. A very important part of learning, feedback means different things to different people — and the Learning Designs standard reminds us of the importance of differentiating our feedback to adults with different ways of understanding and experiencing learning environments and the world.

It also helps us to be mindful of the need to integrate a diversity of pedagogical practices and processes to enhance learning in order to meet the needs of adults with different ways of knowing. For a fuller discussion of feedback from a developmental perspective, see *The Art of Feedback* (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, in press).

Some adults, such as self-authoring knowers, might welcome concise, direct feedback on their practice — as well as the opportunity to voice their own opinions and perspectives in return. Others, such as socializing knowers, might have a harder time taking in critical feedback if it is not expressed in a way that feels genuinely supportive, caring, and appreciative of that adult's positive contributions as well. Yet others, such as instrumental knowers, might prefer more concrete feedback offered within a predetermined structure.

It might be helpful to think about what it means — from a developmental perspective — to give and receive feedback. A very important part of learning, feedback means different things to different people.

Nevertheless, when offering feedback as a support to another adult's professional learning and growth, the most effective holding environments meet adults where they are in a developmental sense and also gently encourage these adults to stretch beyond comfortable competencies and capacities over time.

In the end, both constructive-developmental theory and the first strand of the Learning Designs standard illuminate the critical importance of infusing our learning designs with the best of what we know from theory, research, and models.

There are many possible and promising theories, research, and models to draw from when shaping spaces as genuine learning contexts for self and others. Constructive-developmental theory is one that can be employed when designing learning experiences for adults. As such, it offers a number of key, unique takeaways that have important implications for designers and facilitators of learning.

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Take a whole new look at how to use resources

Continued from p. 30

- Leveraging evaluation information requires one-on-one debriefing time with coaches.

Even if a school system can find ways to shift resources to support these efforts, it may not have the necessary expertise to do so. This is why systems are turning to outside providers of teacher leadership, coaching, and analysis. It also puts a premium on using technology to lower the cost of mentoring, collaboration, and support.

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