Smilkstein supplements recent research on the brain with her own classroom-based research to illustrate key understandings about how people learn. For example, she states “curricula that give students the opportunity to use their brains’ innate resources give them the opportunity to be the natural learners they were meant to be.” In her view, traditional classrooms too often ignore the brain’s resources—for example, the innate ability of the brain to seek patterns and to solve problems.

Smilkstein sees application of brain research to curriculum development as the current “missing link.” To fill this gap, she presents a model—based on what she calls the Natural Human Learning Process—which includes six stages for instruction of new skills and knowledge:

- Preparing to learn (using current knowledge);
- Starting to learn (experimental practice);
- Consolidating new basis (skillful practice);
- Branching out (knowing in more detail);
- Gaining fluency (using it, doing it); and
- Continued improvement (wider application).

Each of these stages requires opportunities for individual work, small-group activity/interactivity, and whole-group feedback Smilkstein suggests teachers use a matrix with a cell for each stage as a template for curriculum planning.