



Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

“The Practitioner’s Best Friend”
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Do I need to be a connected educator?

“I’m convinced that we as educators have an obligation to initiate new learning, become skillful in the use of new tools that accelerate and advance our learning work, and share with others what we are learning.” - Pam Moran, Superintendent Albermarle County Public Schools

Educators have worked extremely hard over the past years to shift away from a paradigm of isolation and closed doors to one of inclusion and support. School districts have developed and established professional learning communities to further the practice of connecting with colleagues and eliminate the practice of isolation. Through this intentional work, school leaders and educators have learned from each other, supported one another through new learning, and become reliant on a small team of colleagues for support and encouragement. They have become “connected” and see the potential in continuing the work.

Being connected to others is exciting. As educators it is powerful to know that we can share ideas and learn from one another. We now have the opportunity to stretch our thinking and create a network for learning. Too often though, this network is limited to just our school walls. To be a truly “connected educator”, we need to expand our network beyond the walls of the school and engage and participate in the global connectedness we live in.

To do this we must look beyond the traditional meaning of connectedness. Defining it is not as simple as participating in a professional learning community at your school, belonging to the science team in your district, or knowing your colleagues and staff. Many people instantly assume that in order to become a connected educator we need to embrace technology as the vehicle for this. Technology can play a critical role, but being connected is much more than just using technology. It is about the interactions and conversations we have with people. It’s about connecting with people who inspire, support, and enrich your learning. It’s about creating conversations that have purpose and meaning to your work. It’s about becoming a connected learner and increasing your expertise. In order to do this, an educator must be willing to:

- Seek out and connect with other educators through any means, technology or otherwise.
- Explore, create, share, and contribute something meaningful to the group.
- Become digitally literate through the use of Twitter, reading of blogs, and the development of a Personal Learning Network (PLN).
- Share with colleagues what you have learned through connecting with other educators.

- Be transparent in thinking and reflect on the conversations you take part in.
- Talk about how being connected has affected your work.

For me the answer about needing to be a connected educator is clearly yes. Being an active participant in the connected world with which we live, has had a profound impact on my work as a school leader. The connections I have created through using technology and otherwise, has allowed me to break down the isolation I feel as a solo building administrator. I have a network of wisdom that I can turn to when I need information or want to learn something new. Knowing that I can reach out and receive thoughtful, intelligent, and honest feedback is comforting. The more conversations I have, the more I realize there is no way I could effectively do my job without being a connected educator.

Here are a few ways that our school and I have benefitted by becoming connected with others:

- Fifth grade students participating in an “Identity Day” project where they create a display that shows what they are passionate about in their life. This idea came from Chris Wejr, Principal at James Hill Elementary in Langley, British Columbia. This project has become an integral part of our end of school year reflection.
- Participating in the World Read Aloud Day with multiple classes in our school. Through the power of Skype we read books aloud to other classrooms across the world. Reading with a class of students in the country of Jordan was a highlight for all.
- Participation in a local network of local school administrators to examine and reflect on the implementation of a new teacher evaluation system.
- Learning how to become more effective in my work as an instructional leader by participating in educational chats (edchats) on Twitter.
- Developing a collaborative writing project between our school and an elementary school in Missouri.

This list is by now ways exhaustive, but I hope it provides you with a small glimpse on how being connected has made the work that happens in our school meaningful.

We live in a connected world and the students that walk through our doors each day are connected. They want and need educators that are connected, not just through technology, but also with each other. Being connected to others is exciting and I hope you find being connected as enriching to your practice as I have in mine.

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