CHAPTER 1

Sharing and Collaboration

The Engine for the Connected Classroom

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. How does courage emerge in a connected classroom?
2. What does it feel like to share with vigor? What emerges from adding this to your professional routine?
3. How do you break the inertia of a school culture to ignite new learning?

THE THEORY

The desire to share is human. When people ask for assistance, there is a natural urge to say yes. It may take time from the day or attention away from the focus of the moment, but to serve others brings great pleasure. In schools, there are many moments when teachers are asked to assist those who share their learning space. Teachers cover classrooms for doctor's appointments. They share kids with another class for a meeting that pops up and print sub plans when their colleagues are away. All of these speak to the natural human urge to share, support, and help.

Scaling this sharing and collaborating to truly amplify genuine instruction remains a work in progress. Even in a time when the resources and tools are plentiful to allow it to happen, teachers are not sharing and collaborating at high rates across school boundaries. Both structural and attitudinal barriers remain. Ask a prospective teacher candidate about three teachers outside the school with whom they deeply collaborate on an ongoing basis, and except for a few, rare occasions, they don't have a quality response to the question.

Why is this cross-school, cross-state, cross-country sharing essential? It is a simple case of ideas amplification. The best ideas are always as fragmented as a jigsaw puzzle. Some pieces are being used in one classroom, while other important pieces are found in another. It takes deep sharing across many classrooms to bring together the puzzle pieces that are needed to maximize learning.

All teachers want to grow as professionals, and all teachers accept that change will happen (even if they don't like it), but they need fresh models on how to share and collaborate in this connected learning ecosystem. Those that are connecting and leading connected classrooms are eagerly searching for the best ideas, resources, and materials from every place possible. Teachers in these connected spaces understand that a deep level of sharing by more and more teachers can build the network of resources needed to wrap around all places of learning. Connected classrooms also believe in the marketplace of ideas and the need for ideas and concepts to simmer over time, under the pressure and scrutiny of use, by students in multiple classrooms.

Habitual sharing also means growing more and more comfortable with criticism and questions of clarification. Teachers wanting to grow into this way of thinking and leading their classroom may need to ask if they are ready to be wrong, fail publicly, and have a perpetual stream of doubters about what they see as best practices.

THE CLASSROOM CONNECTION

J. P. Prezzavento serves as the instructional technology coordinator for a school district in Arnold, Missouri, where he helps teachers create authentic learning experiences for students. Previously, J. P. was a high school English language arts teacher who empowered his

> *students to succeed by giving them voice and choice in their learning and used technology to give his students a global audience with whom they could share their learning.*

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A few years ago, I grew more dedicated to sharing and collaborating in a generous way. I shared because I wanted to grow as an educator, and I was eager to reach new levels for my students. One of the first things that I did to start this journey was to move all of my unit resources into a shareable space. In the beginning, I placed the resources on a classroom website as well as used a number of collaborative online resources to breathe new life into my units of study. I then started to share my units with other teachers in my school and beyond.

In addition to this move, I had been thinking of presenting at a conference for some time, but I hadn't built the courage. For me, it wasn't so much about presenting in front of adults, as I had successfully led many professional development sessions, but it was about getting past the idea that I had nothing to offer. I believe that too often teachers are overly humble about the incredible things that are happening in their classrooms, and it led me to realize that presenting ideas wasn't about being polished and perfect but about stimulating thinking, sparking new connections, and setting off a chain reaction of secondary conversations.

Every teacher has a story to tell, and that idea led me to discuss how I was sharing and growing by being more transparent with my work. Ultimately, I wanted colleagues who had big dreams for kids, and I hoped that my transparency would support their work. During this time, I met my new connected tribe at an edcamp event in town. These events build a culture that attracts innovative, energetic professionals. Since the event, I have cultivated these new professional connections.

I have also increased the sharing of the learning in my classroom. I regularly post pictures and videos, and I encourage my students to create media to share their learning journey from a student lens. This transparency has provided a learning narrative for parents and the local community, and I also hope that it will spark others around me to do the same.

ACTION STEPS

(Note: In each chapter's action steps, there will be *** by the action steps specifically designed for classroom, building, and district leaders who are new to growing a connected classroom.)

1. **Amplify your online presence with Twitter.** Using Twitter to share ideas and resources can begin to build a habit of collaboration. There are weekly chats and ongoing hashtags for every subject and specialty.

2. **Built a cohort of allies that come from within the school and beyond.** It is essential to have your ideas, resources, and materials flowing through a network.

***3. **Look for public audiences for your work and the work of your students.** Begin using the mental model that your classroom is a museum, a place for others to visit, enjoy, and learn.

RESOURCES

The links for this chapter focus on some great places for those new to the connected learning space to begin. They include online learning spaces that aggregate great content and ideas for use in the classroom. There is also information on the concept of school as a museum that can be adapted for a classroom looking to fill the classroom walls with great learning and great additional learning opportunities for kids.

Livebinders (http://www.livebinders.com/welcome/home)

Wikispaces (https://www.wikispaces.com/)

Getting Started on Twitter (http://www.livebinders.com/play/play/34291)

School as a Museum (http://bit.ly/Schoolasmuseum)

Pinterest (http://www.pinterest.com/all/education)