Book Review

What Connected Educators Do Differently

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Abstract

What Connected Educators Do Differently encourages educators to begin connecting via social media to further their own learning and success. Whitaker, Zoul and Casas support teachers pursuing digital connection through step-by-step suggestions and resources, arguing that educators will grow as learners and teachers, and develop their access to a "large collective brain trust consisting of diverse ideas and perspectives" (p. xxiii).

Keywords: *connect, technology, communication*

Educators teach in many, usually overlapping, contexts: schools may be in low or high socioeconomic status areas, students come from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and school administrations may provide a greater or lesser degree of support. Given these multiple contexts, *What Connected Educators Do Differently* gently and tactfully confronts the resistance educators may have against incorporating social networking and digital technologies into their classrooms and professional development.

One of the great strengths of the book is its tone: the introduction, though sometimes repetitious, simulates a friendly conversation between the three authors and the reader. This contrasts with many teaching textbooks, which tend to adopt an impersonal voice, making reader engagement more difficult to sustain. Teachers who have experienced a sense of isolation due to the "every educator for her-or-himself" mentality that sometimes prevails in schools will be grateful for the way *What Connected Educators Do Differently* combats this. New or experienced teachers who find themselves, or those around them, too busy to create a local community can find a safe alternative community through the Internet

A specific and practical strength of the text is the consistent chapter endings: "Follow 5, Find 5, Take 5." These snippets provide readers with five educators contactable via Twitter, five online resources to improve teaching and connecting via YouTube, Twitter, and other websites as well as five concrete actions to take. These actions can easily be modified depending on the context of one's specific classroom. For example, at the end of the chapter "Embrace the Three Cs" (Communication, Collaboration, and Community), the authors recommend "Create a video highlighting your students and school and then upload the video to YouTube. Send the link to your P2LN on Twitter" (p. 43). If this step needs to be modified into a picture slide show due to a lack of video cameras, or if parents do not want their students to be in the video, footage of the school campus could be used, and so on.

Educators often find themselves alone in creating plans, resources, worksheets and other curricular instruments. Additionally, teachers who ask to borrow or share content sometimes receive negative responses. Chapter 4 of *What Connected Educators Do Differently*, "Give and Take...and Give Some More," challenges this mindset, reminding readers "Connected educators possess an almost fanatical 'pay it forward' mindset, whereby they become energized not only by giving, but also by receiving help" (p. 46). This chapter lets both new and seasoned educators know it is, in fact, good to share content.

Chapter 7, "Model the Way," urges educators to model positive behavior in being connected through social media. The authors warn against succumbing to hypothetical concerns about social media, such as "What if a student links to an inappropriate website? What if a student tweets something inappropriate about another student or staff member?" (p. 100). These are legitimate concerns; the authors have no problem letting readers know that these situations will happen. By modeling a response, however, that treats such occasions as learning opportunities, educators can show others how to embrace and deal with tough situations rather than denying students access to useful digital resources. The message of this chapter can be applied to other areas of education: when the unexpected happens, model and make it a teachable moment.

The book closes with Chapter 8, which offers advice on when to unplug. These are simple suggestions, such as reading a non-electronic text with coffee in the morning, or finding solitude in which to reflect. This conclusion reinforces the personal and connected tone the authors adopt throughout the book. This information might be shared with the audience earlier in the text, as some readers may be implementing the material as they go, but the text is short and reaching this thoughtful ending should not take long.

Technology is rapidly transforming education and *What Connected Educators Do Differently* encourages teachers to keep up. Through social media, teachers can create connections with other teachers, parents, and students to promote further learning and accomplishment. The book borders on repetitiveness at times, which may deter already avid technology users. But even experienced educators can still find resources and ideas

in *What Connected Educators Do Differently* to better their own teaching and online connections for their students. This novice and expert-friendly handbook is an important guide for all educators who want to participate in online platforms and technological communities.

References

Whitaker, T., Zoul, J., & Casas, J. (2015). *What Connected Educators Do Differently*. Routledge, NY.