

On Becoming Connected Principals

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The classroom walls of isolation have crumbled. Teachers work together through inquiry, collaboration and PLC's to share lessons, analyze data, and make informed decisions to help their students learn. Yet, the office of the principal, especially in elementary and small schools with only one administrator in the building, remains a lonely isolated place!

Principals are finding it more difficult than ever to crawl through the rubble and get out of their offices to network and learn with colleagues and peers across Connecticut. The demands and expectations on principals have increased exponentially due to major initiatives such as Common Core State Standards, teacher and principal evaluation and Smarter Balanced Assessments, to name a few. Often the thought of driving even 20 - 30 miles for an educational conference, workshop, or meeting at CAS seems like a luxury that most of us find more and more difficult, if not impossible, to afford.

Yet, just when we need each other more than ever, it has become next to impossible to find the time to "reach out and touch someone." (Remember this commercial from 1979 when life was simpler <http://tinyurl.com/3qp6w5z> ?) LOL

It's not just enough to simply "reach out and touch someone," although we all need our friends. In these trying times of intense stress and high stakes accountability, we need the collective wisdom of each other so we can work together, smarter – not harder – to make a difference for ALL Connecticut students.

So, fast-forward almost 35 years since that Bell Telephone commercial aired. Technology is now ubiquitous <http://tinyurl.com/pyz98k3>. We have the ability to connect anytime, anywhere via our desktops, laptops, smartphones and other mobile devices. But, for some strange reason, many of us don't find the time to do the one thing that can help us the most. That is, use the technology we have at our fingertips to connect with each other in meaningful and purposeful ways without leaving our offices or homes.

So, how can we, CAS principals, harness technology to connect with our colleagues and peers across Connecticut to share stories, learn together, grow professionally, work smarter, network, inspire and support each other and maybe even vent a little, when we can't even find time during the day to eat lunch?

It all comes down to priorities. What's important gets done! For all of the above stated reasons, I can't think of anything more important than making time each day to use technology to connect with colleagues. It's easier than you might think.

Connected Principals – Connected Educators

For the past two years, the US Department of Education Connected Educators ConnectED initiative <http://goo.gl/m0vQ0> has named October as Connected Educator month <http://connectededucators.org/>. Through the ConnectED program, President Obama is working with the Federal Communications Commission and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to connect 99% of

American students to the internet through high-speed broadband and high-speed wireless within 5 years.

For the past two years hundreds of organizations, including NAESP and NASSP, have worked together during the month of October to provide learning opportunities that increase the visibility of online learning, collaboration, and networking. For example, this past October, I became involved with the Connected Principal Tweet Chats sponsored by NAESP, NASSP, and the Connected Principal, using the hashtag, #cpchats. You can view an example from the storified archive of the October 9, 2013 #cpchat at <http://goo.gl/mE6bn2>. On the Connected Principal website, you can read blogs and find numerous resources for principals by principals at <http://connectedprincipals.com/>. You can also read about my experiences and what I learned by “Chatting With Connected Principals” during the #cpchat Tweet Chats at <http://goo.gl/G5G3az>.

Online educational organizations, communities, and learning networks are providing educational resources and professional learning activities throughout the year. One of my favorite sources for learning is through the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) <https://www.iste.org/>. For example, there are numerous Special Interest Groups (SIGS) such as the SIG for administrators (SIGAdmin), SIG for Virtual Environments (SIGVE) and SIG for Mobile Learning (SIGML) that provide activities throughout the year to engage educators anywhere in the world in “just-in-time” learning and collaboration events. These activities range from online article and book study discussions, to webinars, to Tweet Chats, to unsymposiums and synchronous presentations in virtual environments, such as Second Life at <http://secondlife.com/>, with educators and educational experts.

Why Connect?

Many of you reading this article are probably already connected with family and friends through popular social media sites such as Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube, Linked-In and Twitter. Why? To share pictures and experiences; stay informed and in touch with each other; and, to build friendships and relationships with family and friends. I bet during this past Thanksgiving holiday many of you, like me, shared text messages, emails, photos, and videos including face-time with your friends and family who were separated by distance.

Reaching out to touch someone has taken on a whole new meaning in 2013!

Social media makes it easy to share, build relationships, stay informed and in touch with those we love. Doesn't it make sense to harness these same technologies to help us stay connected with colleagues and friends across Connecticut so we can share strategies to help us work more effectively and efficiently and to learn with and from each other virtually?

What if there was a way to do this without spending an hour each way traveling to and from the meetings?

Harnessing the Technology

Those of you who know me (and/or my avatar Roxie Neiro) know that connecting virtually and achieving the same quality of experience without traveling to get there is my ultimate goal. Roxie can teleport to any number of venues in

Second Life in a few seconds. Rosie, on the other hand, spends way too much time sitting in traffic jams trying to get from point “A” to point “B.”

The good news is that the number of ways to connect and learn from educators (experts and novices alike) anywhere around the world without leaving the comfort of your own home increases daily. In fact, one of my favorite times to be connected with others is early Saturday morning in Second Life while I am having my first cup of coffee. Or, in my comfy slippers and bathrobe at 8:00 pm doing Tweet Chats, reading my personal Tweeted Times Newspaper <http://tweetedtimes.com/> or watching archived Google+ hangouts. (For information about how to use Google+ Hangouts in the classroom see <http://goo.gl/2kEEyK>.)

I know that all of this, including tweeting, may sound a little strange and even a little geeky. But, be sure to read “Chatting With Connected Principals” online at <http://goo.gl/G5G3az> so you can click on the links and find the golden nuggets embedded in the URLs in the tweets from other principals during the #cpchats. There is so much to learn from those 140 character tweets!

Join the CAS Professional Learning Network (PLN)

In October, CAS held a workshop by National Digital Principal Award winner Patrick Larkin on how to tweet. Later in October, members of the workshop participated in the first CAS Tweet Chat using the hashtag #CASchat.

CAS has planned several activities such as Tweet chats in the new year to begin leveraging the use of technology and building a Connecticut principal-centered PLN. We hope you will start to follow CAS in Twitter @CAS_CT!

If you aren’t sure if tweeting is for you or if you want to learn more about how to get started tweeting, check out “To Tweet Or Not To Tweet?” at <http://goo.gl/8lxDb0>. There are also videos on YOUTUBE only a Google search away to help you learn how to tweet.

Likewise, another great resource for getting started as a connected educator is the CEM (Connected Educator Month) Starter Kit and the CEM District Toolkit <http://goo.gl/481BRw>. Both Kits are free. The CEM Starter Kit is loaded with helpful links and embedded videos that can help you get connected. The CEM District Toolkit is designed for administrators and teacher leaders to help others in their school or district stay connected all year long. Both are full of ideas, resources, and video links.

Finally, CAS is starting an online Book Club in February. We want to hear from you about which book we should read and discuss. Please take a minute to answer the questions at <http://goo.gl/MMzqnd>. We will vote on the most popular book nominees during the first week in January. The book with the most votes in January will become the first CAS Book Club selection.

GIVE Yourself A Gift

This morning I was reading my personal issue of the Tweeted Times <http://tweetedtimes.com/>. I found an article called “Why Learning Through Social Networks Is The Future” <http://goo.gl/10uImw>. Paul Moss writes, “*The wealth of*

professional development that stems from such a network [Professional Learning Network] is quickly defining it as an essential tool for teachers [and I would add administrators], and will, I believe, replace organized, costly professional development undertaken by organizations.” Of course, Rosie and virtual Roxie are excited!

Becoming a connected principal gives you the power to become that self-directed, self-actualized learner.

What are you waiting for? This year, when it is time to make your New Year’s Resolution, forget the diet! Instead, give yourself the powerful gift of becoming a connected principal! Together, let’s share ideas, stories, pictures, strategies, and thoughts as we learn and grow together to make a difference for ourselves and for ALL Connecticut students.

Articles/Blogs

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