



Why “blank” Matters



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Preface

WHAT IS UNPLUG'D?

“If a teacher thinks in the forest, does he/she make a sound?”

A diverse collection of Canadian educators with experience that spans primary, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary classrooms, answered that very question at ‘UnPlug’d: Canadian Education Summit’.

UnPlug’d delegates gathered amidst the concrete of downtown Toronto, before making their way to Northern Edge Algonquin, a retreat on the northwest corner of Algonquin Park. By the time the weekend was over, participants had traveled by plane, train, bus, kayak, canoe, and mountain bike, all in order to connect with transparent learners who embrace opportunities to think, learn, and teach.

By unplugging from their highly networked personal and professional lives, participating Canadian change agents:

- reflected on personal and professional learning while forging connections to the learning stories of other participants;
- shared stories of small scale innovation with colleagues who are similarly engaged in discovering what matters most in teaching and learning;
- transformed digital relationships through face-to-face encounters, strengthening the loose ties that bind us as networked Canadian educators;
- went deeper with ideas than might otherwise be possible, amidst the hush of a natural, purely Canadian setting;
- came to appreciate what it means to be a teacher and learner in Canada, both today, and for tomorrow.

“But did it make a sound?”

A multitude of conversations, stories, and ideas will resonate from the UnPlug’d experience. One artifact of the collective wisdom of the group is this document: “Why *blank* Matters” which was first published on the heels of the summit.

To discover more about UnPlug'd and to meet the participants, visit www.unplugd.ca
To tour the UnPlug'd11 Photo Pool, visit <http://www.flickr.com/groups/1753363@N23/pool/>
To tour Northern Edge Algonquin, the host site, visit www.algonquincanada.com
To receive UnPlug'd updates, follow [@unplugdca](https://twitter.com/unplugdca) or the hashtag [#unplugd11](https://twitter.com/unplugd11)
To learn from the delegates, follow the group: [http://twitter.com/#!/unplugdca/unplugd-2011](https://twitter.com/#!/unplugdca/unplugd-2011)

A CANADIAN CONTEXT

Being Canadian can be tricky. We are relatively few people, who live in a very large country. People who don't live here think we're all about snow and the RCMP. But the truth is that Canada is an innovative, multicultural, urban nation. This summit was about the changing reality of education in our time.

Unplug'd was different from other conferences for a lot of reasons, and one them was that it was a distinctly Canadian experience. Thirty seven educators gathered in Toronto, Canada's largest city, but we didn't stay there. Instead, we climbed on a train and travelled four hours north to an off the grid lodge in the Ontario forest. This was our opportunity to look deeply at learning in our nation. Discussions took place by the lake, in the lake and on the lake. We gathered around a campfire and around sunrises and sunsets.

This summit didn't take place because a corporation or government agency brought us together, but because of a dedicated group of volunteers who had the vision to see what was possible when things grow out of a grassroots movement. And in the end, when our work was finished, the entire set of artifacts produced; the photos, the essays, the doodles and the videos are not for sale anywhere. Instead, they are all being released under a Creative Commons license to encourage wide sharing.

Unplug'd included urban and rural. It included Anglophone and Francophone. It included East and West. And it was all Canadian. Canadian educators coming together from across our nation to talk about learning for our time. This book is our voice to the world and to ourselves.

Clarence Fisher



UnPlug'd Photo by Andrew Forgrave taken August 6th at 5:40 a.m. at Northern Edge Algonquin

WHY UNPLUGGING MATTERS



by *[George Siemens](#)*

Take a minute and think about the routines that define you and the activities you engage in each day. You get up in the morning. Have a cup of coffee? Go for a run? Take the dog for a walk? What about your commute? Same route every morning? Same bus? Once you're at work, sit in the same chair? Greet the same people?

If you're like most people, much of your day is on autopilot. I know mine is. My commute to work is so structured I can spend the entire time lost in thought or lost in a podcast. Sometimes I'm not able to clearly recall what happened en route.

Routines are great for producing consistent results and outcomes. Without some level of routine, society would not function. In fact, the automation of normal routines contributes to advancement of any field: once a basic routine has been automated, we can begin to focus on the next level of complexity. For example, if we don't spend several hours a day worrying about how to catch our dinner in the wilderness, we can devote our focus to other tasks. Behind that stop at the supermarket on the way home, rest thousands of automated routines.

Routines – the ones we personally engage in or the ones that define society – are the embodiment of values we've held and choices we've made in the past. Routines support and reinforce the system in which they function. Sometimes, however, it's important to break the normalizing influence of routines. Structure and routine produce consistent results. If we're not happy with the results we are getting from our schools, our governments or our society, we need to break structure so that we can encounter new ideas and develop new perspectives. This is about more than unplugging technologically. It's about unplugging from the structures that we render to an unconscious and non-reflective state. Sometimes that takes a new location, a new group of people to have conversations with and disconnecting from the technologies that normalize our activities. Times of change require new thinking. Unplugging enables us to recognize that newness.

Chapter 1

The Change We Need



*Jaclyn Calder, Andrew Forgrave, Lorna Costantini, Darren Kuropatwa, Shelley Wright, Chris Harbeck
[UnPlug'd Photo](#) by Chris Harbeck taken August 8th at at Northern Edge Algonquin*



WHY FAMILIES MATTER



by *[Lorna Costantini](#)*

Have you heard families say, "They really don't want us involved"? Maybe it is a response to something teachers think but don't say: "Just what I need more parent involvement".

Ideas like this are one of the barriers that impact how families and schools work together. When they don't get along student learning can take a back seat.

Contrary to the way schools function, the research is clear. Students whose families are supportive of their child's learning do better in school, have fewer drug and alcohol problems and finish secondary school.

Researchers have discovered something else. The support that families give to their children at home has a greater impact on their child's achievement than their attendance at school events.

Think of all the wasted hours worrying about "Why only a few parents show up at the school", "Why it is always the same parents" and "Why few parents answer a survey".

Schools have all the resources, skills and abilities to put into place supports for families so they can support children at home. The change we need is easy. It only takes your imagination to make families matter.

WHY YOU MATTER



by [Darren Kuropatwa](#)

You matter because you can change the face of teaching and learning in your school. All you have to do is change the world - a little bit at a time.

No teacher before you has ever taught children quite the way you do. No one ever will again.

The world needs to know what you're doing. How you go about sharing your passion, your excitement, your enthusiasm for learning with the students in your classroom every day.

You make a difference in the world in the way you do this.

What you want for your students is for them to excel beyond your own expertise in all they learn from you.

It's the dream of every teacher: to have your students become more knowledgeable, more capable, more competent than you.

It's a measure of success.

Essentially you share your spark with them.

What we most want is to pass on that spark, this other centred attitude, an attitude towards the world that says: You Matter!

Adopting the attitude: "You Matter", making people other than ourselves important and finding ways to make them more awesome, in the end, makes each of us a little more awesome. It creates the change we need in the world.

Let's pass that on to our students so they know they matter and understand their job is to make everyone they meet a little more awesome. When they've internalized what they've learned from us and brought it to another level: that's success.

No one will ever see the world through the eyes of our students again. No one ever has, throughout the entire history of humanity. They have a unique contribution to make. We help them understand this is also true for everyone they meet.

Imagine a Canada, a world, where every politician, every trades-person, every professional, every store clerk tackled the world in this way? They're all sitting in your classroom. Learning from you. Teach us too. Share what you know. Share how you know. Share what you learn. We need you too. You matter.

WHY SELF-DIRECTION MATTERS



by *[Andrew Forgrave](#)*

What kind of learners does Canada, and our world, need?

Sir Ken Robinson laments our continued factory-approach to educating children. He advocates for supporting individuals as they “find their passion.”

Allowing employees time to “play” and inquire one day out of five is how Google quantifies their belief in the value of individual interests. They seek to validate the shared benefits of having their employees self-direct.

As educators (and as a society in general) we need to re-focus: We need to empower learners such that they acquire the skills to be self-directed in their approach to learning. Sooner. Rather than teaching students, we need to shift to educating learners. It’s more than semantics.

Currently, structures like routines and consistency in schooling run counter to supporting a learner’s autonomy in the process. The change we need, in our communities, our country, and indeed, our world, is to nurture individuals who have the motivation to inquire, the willingness to collaborate, the knowledge to inform, and the confidence to act.

In the words of Robert Frost, “Education is hanging around until you’ve caught on.” We need more learners who have “caught on.” Caught on at an earlier age, such that they can surely find their positive effect, and share it with others.

WHY SOCIAL JUSTICE MATTERS



by *Shelley Wright*

“Where you live should no longer determine whether you live.” Bono

Human oppression, animal exploitation, and ecological degradation occur today at rates likely unprecedented in human history. And it’s destroying our world.

More people are enslaved today than during the entire trans-Atlantic slave trade.

One billion people are malnourished or starving, living on less than a dollar a day.

Two billion live on less than two dollars a day.

Almost half the world’s population.

Rainforests destroyed and species lost forever, all for short-term profit.

But this is not the final story.

We know things need to change. So do our students. It’s time our classrooms are structured to help our students impact the world —now. That what they learn and do in school actually matters; it helps create the change we need.

Technology allows individual voices to come together and speak with one voice. It’s time to use that voice.

Social Justice explores, and then lives out in tangible ways, how to live with compassion and respect for others. It invites students to envision creative solutions for the problems our world is facing, and then begin implementing those changes, while challenging others to do the same.

History will judge us by what we do, or do not do, right now. We cannot say we didn’t know. We cannot say we didn’t have the resources or ability. We may need to admit we didn’t care.

It’s not about charity. It’s about justice -- the clock is ticking.

WHY THE VILLAGE MATTERS



by [Jaclyn Calder](#)

When you think back to your favourite class in school, was it the content or the teacher who made it memorable? I went into science because of my high school science teachers. They told me that I was smart and capable. They cared about what happened in my life; in and outside of school.

Teachers often feel powerless, yet we have the ability to help struggling students take charge of their own learning by developing relationships based on respect and support. Dr. Russell Bishop's research found that teachers felt socio-economic status had the biggest impact on student success.

Students however, felt their relationships with their teachers had the biggest impact. This can be intimidating; it can also be empowering for teachers. It provides the opportunity to help struggling students be successful by creating supportive relationships. This does not mean we must have mentor-like relationships with every student we teach, but we must ensure every student has a mentor they trust and respect. "It takes a village to raise a child". Our schools need to be just that - communities of learning.

Teachers are faced with amazing pressures to both improve achievement and teach in new and exciting ways. The change we need is tough. To change the way we teach, we need partners. We need people who will support us, push us and collaborate with us. We are in the same shoes as our students. Learning along side our students, teachers need positive, supportive relationships.

We need the village. Schools need to function with communities, to ensure no learner is without support. Allow each learner to find the people they need to succeed. Everyone needs to feel supported, challenged and allowed to take risks in the process of learning.

WHY DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP MATTERS



by [*Chris Harbeck*](#)

Digital Citizenship can mean many things. Students need to learn to take control of their Digital Footprint and be ethically responsible. But there is more to citizenship. Students need to use technology to improve their lives and the lives of others. Believe it or not, a teens world view at the turn of the last Millennium was not very different from today. One thousand years ago a teen's entire world was as far as they could walk and return in a day. Today's teens have a similarly small world view even though the technology allows them to be around the globe in seconds. Teens today are glued to their technology but don't have a good sense of what is happening outside of their immediate social circle or group of friends.

As teachers we are working hard to teach students to be good citizens at home in their local communities. But home has now become the globe. What a student can accomplish in a day is very different now. We need to use the technologies available to them to fully embrace and access the global aspects of our planet to allow students to participate fully in creating change. If we start the seed of digital citizenship growing when they are young and malleable it will continue to grow into later life.

How do we teach Digital Citizenship? Should students wade into social media without a guide? Odds are their teachers will be that guide and need to be well versed in the use of social media. Our classrooms are communities of learners, global communities. The walls of the traditional classroom have been expanded. We must use social media to connect students with one another online. Students must learn to share with each other and with other students around the globe in ethical and responsible ways. The change we need is for students to get global.

Chapter 2

Voices & Choices



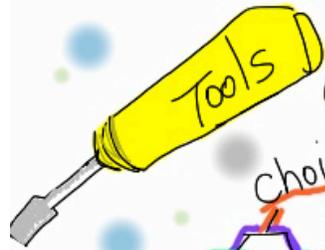
*Andy McKiel, Giulia Forsythe, Kathy Cassidy, Rodd Lucier, Bryan Jackson, Kim Gill
[UnPlug'd Photo](#) by Chris Harbeck taken August 8th at Northern Edge Algonquin*

Truth

objectivity

perspective

Voice & Choice



Freedom



choice



"What's the point?"

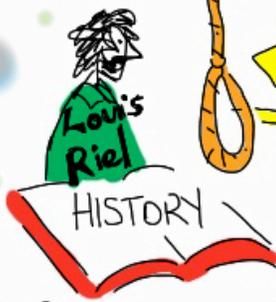
ASK THE KIDS



How DO Current events



affect me



this I believe



WHY SHARING OUR STORIES MATTERS



by [Bryan Jackson](#)

As individuals and communities, we are the stories we tell ourselves. How we make meaning and truth of our past experiences depends on our ability to rehearse and engage in telling our own narratives.

*We are taught the nature of history,
and government – communication,
storytelling in the name of
a pursuit of knowledge
of ourselves, and the breadth of our nature
to be capable of making something
and living the best life we can.*

Our shared vision of the Truth is stitched from the individual threads of our unique interpretations of the human experience, whether in empirical observation, or creative expression. If the role of education is to prepare learners to be active participants in the creation of themselves and their world, they must be versed in the language of narratives to authentically recognize and express their own voices.

*Our present moment asks that we stand and be counted
as lives lived to the best of our honest knowledge
about what our actions mean.*

In learning to create the conditions of personal and collective storytelling, we are empowering ourselves to better understand our role in the world, and participate actively in the creation of a shared future. If we are able to recognize ourselves as

protagonists within the larger narrative of our communities, we can write the story of our collective futures. We learn, after all,

*...To know what others
have been willing to stand for
when doing so has not been easy.
because it never is easy,
and surely will not be when it is our turn,
whether we are standing for our lives,
our minds, or our own opinion
in a world where everyone's
from New Orleans' orphans
to the Kings of Spain
is exactly equal.*

WHY PERSPECTIVE MATTERS



by [*Andy McKiel*](#)

We must attend to the various perspectives that each stakeholder brings into our buildings. Regardless of our roles, every one of us has a vested interest in the learning that takes place within our classrooms. And yet each of us has a different lens that we use to measure the effectiveness of these actions.

We must consider how our students, teachers, parents, colleagues, and administrators perceive events that unfold throughout a given day. For an administrator who walks into a classroom to observe a lesson, the best way to determine the effectiveness of the teaching isn't to sit at the back of the room with a clipboard. Rather, that administrator should sit down beside a student and talk to them about their learning. In many cases, we'll find that we glean more information from the things that we don't see, not in the things that are visible. Open conversations and shared observations can enable us to gain a better insight into the minds of others and see the world through their eyes.

When we take multiple perspectives into consideration, we develop a holistic view of our effectiveness as stakeholders in education. Looking at our actions through the lenses of others will provide a much clearer picture of the quality teaching and learning that takes place in our classrooms and schools.

WHY THE TOOL MATTERS



by *[Kim Gill](#)*

Student Voice:

I have trouble learning, I have special needs,
School is such a hard place for me
I need so much help that I really stand out
But I'd love to work independently

Wouldn't it be grand if people could understand
A desk isn't my best learning space
If people could see, movement's best for me
And learning can happen in many a place

Wouldn't I feel glee if my eyes could see
The numbers and words like my peers
I wish I could look into a book
Without this anxiety and these fears

Teacher Voice:

Here you will see we all learn differently
And we all have something great to share
How we obtain our facts and show what we know
We really don't compare

It'll be so great when you won't have to wait
To access facts and information
Jump online and learn in real time
Learning's not limited by time or location

It'll be so terrific when you can be specific
And demonstrate your learning with pride
Your interests detected by the tools you selected
Creating to show what you know is inside

I need a hook, beyond pencil and book
A tool I can call my own
I need challenges relevant to my world
To prepare for a future unknown

It'll be so exciting when you begin writing
Using social media for audiences beyond our nation
And develop your own learning network
For connecting, sharing, and collaboration

I want to take part and look really smart
I don't want to stupidly stand out in the crowd
I want to finish my work and not feel like a jerk
And make my parents and teachers real proud

Shared Voice:

So come on let's go, let's get ready to grow
Our journey will be as unique as we are
These accommodating tools that we will use
Will be the support that helps us go far.

WHY CHOICE MATTERS



by [Kathy Cassidy](#)

Choice gives me power. I personally can't imagine not having the freedom to create my own day. What to eat for breakfast, what time to leave for school, what to teach and in what order, which student to spend individual time with – these are choices I relish making each day. A day without these decisions would be akin to being in prison, with all of my choices taken away.

Students need this freedom of choice as well. They need to have control over their learning, especially at school where rules, bells and teachers tightly control much of their lives. Rules tell them what they must do and what they must not. Bells indicate where they must be and when. Teachers specify whom they may sit beside and when they may talk.

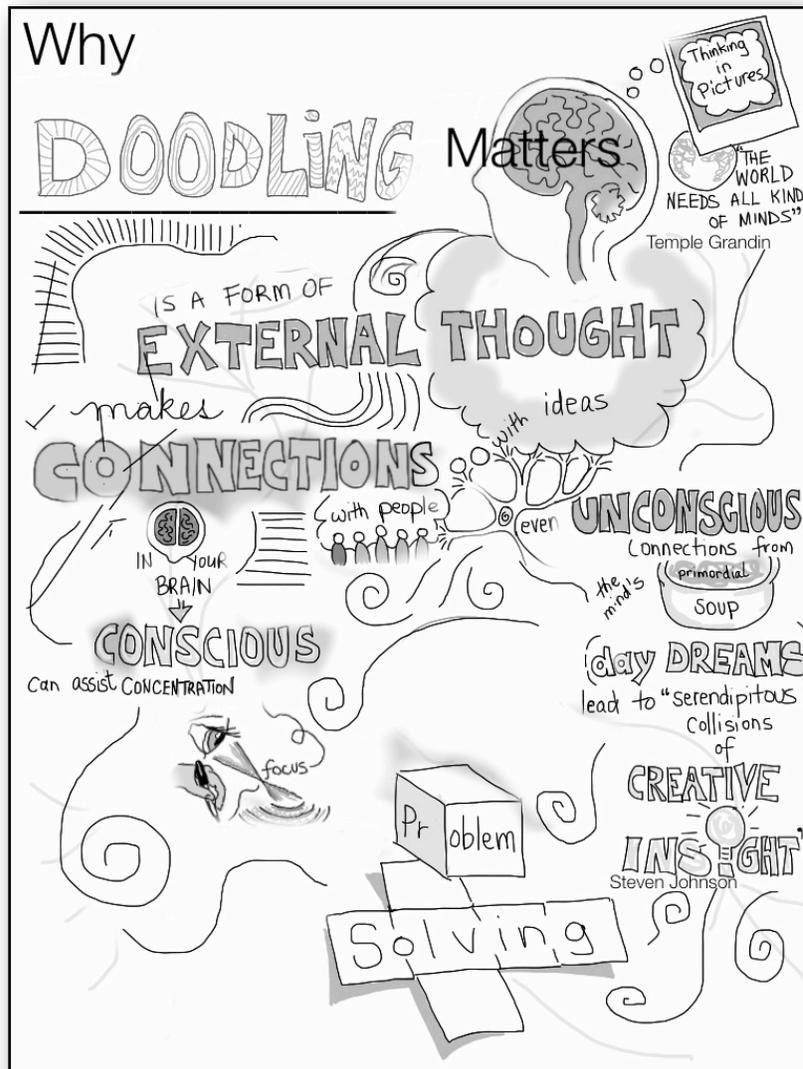
Choice in student learning can take many forms. It can mean choosing when, how, what, where, or with whom to learn. Or it can mean a combination of these. Choices need to include options that are appropriate for each learner.

This freedom makes learning more interesting. It allows for diversity, and encourages students to differentiate their own learning. Making choices is preparation for a future in which students must make their own decisions. Choice gives power.

WHY DOODLING MATTERS



by [Giulia Forsythe](#)



WHY IRRESISTIBLE CHALLENGES MATTER



by *Rodd Lucier*

What is the most irresistible challenge you've ever encountered?

The most compelling problems lead participants to collaborate as members of a team in the design of innovative solutions. When such collaboration draws upon the varied expertise of all learners, the results can be dramatic, memorable, and noteworthy.

Learning in parallel with our students, authentic and compelling challenges hold the key to our personal and professional growth. As project-based learners, we thrive on the challenge of creating. We find intellectual nourishment through the process of collaboration. The most potent artifacts of our learning are the things we create with others.

As a culminating experience, UnPlug'd is the organic result of a year-long collaborative project. Passion-based learning, shared discovery, and face-to-face networking came to life because key collaborators were willing to risk participation in the creative process, donating their time and talent to bring this event to life. When highly networked teacher-learners from across Canada engaged in the process, we re-invented professional development and brought to life a modern learning community.

Which endeavors sustain your attention? Might the creation of new experiences enrich the learning of students and teachers? Why not see a problem as an irresistible challenge? If you find co-creators willing to push in the same direction, you might just do something that's never been done before.

Chapter 3

Shift Disturbing



*Melanie McBride, Brenda Dyck, Zoe Branigan-Pipe, Alec Couros, Clarence Fisher, Daryl Bambic
[UnPlug'd Photo](#) by Chris Harbeck taken August 8th at Northern Edge Algonquin*



WHY DIGITAL LITERACY MATTERS



by [Zoe Branigan-Pipe](#)

Why do we support the domination of text based knowledge and organized learning environments when technology allows for multi-modal forms of learning?

It is no longer just about truth, or fact, or experience, or individual demonstration. Knowledge is about perspective, choice and connections. It is about critical thought, about inquiry and transparency. It is not just about search and retrieval of facts. It is about seeking out as many resources, people, tools and methods as possible and making this information transparent and relevant.

I wonder - Do the affordances of these technologies, which widen our networks, also widen our cognitive capacities?

In this digital age, in the tools I use and the medium I choose, I have grown to think differently about knowledge and how to access and demonstrate it. These instruments of learning and their interchangeability, in many ways have freed me from judgment, inferiority and deficiency. By accessing a networked system of information, people, experience and application - my ability to choose, to ask and to base my understanding and perspective on the opinions, ideas and creation of others is how I access and demonstrate knowledge. I have shifted from a largely written word/ linguistic base to one that uses other ways of communicating and have like many, express my thoughts through visuals, animation, font, colour and even dimensionality. I am more than a recipient in a 'delivery of information' model. The Internet provides tools, platforms and people that are so diverse and offer so many ways of creating, that I can be an artist, a composer, a videographer, a song writer, a scientist and a writer - anyone can.

I wonder - Have these aesthetic choices caused us to shift in how we think in terms of text production consumption?

The plethora of resources has given me the skills and confidence to not only to write and reflect, but also to share and discuss these thoughts with a community that spans our planet. My knowledge is far more than what I can demonstrate - individually- at any given moment as it is about being able to tap into the expertise of others. It is about how I synthesize and apply the abundant information that I can connect to my own life - to make it richer. I wonder - Is it relevant to measure individual knowledge when it depends on the connections, expertise and access to others?

WHY BIG QUESTIONS MATTER



by *[Daryl Bambi](#)*

When we ask big questions, we wonder about the ultimate meaning and purpose of a thing. The students ask, “Why do we need to learn this?” The teachers wonder about the effectiveness of assessment for learning. The administrators question if the capital investment in the latest technology really leverages student learning. To be involved in education means to wrestle with big questions and stakeholders in education, who do not engage in this process, have not yet found their voice in this conversation.

A ‘big question’ wants to discover the essence of a thing; it drives the questioner to the heart of the matter and throws them into the uncertain waters of competing theories and uncomfortable facts. Big questions are disruptive. It takes courage and audacity to ask the big questions. What is true? Why is this important? These questions are intrinsically valuable because of their ability to reorient the searcher towards meaning and purpose that, ultimately, they must construct for themselves.

Teachers like to say that there are no stupid questions but we know that they are not all equal in value. While some may interpret “Why do we need to know this?” as a challenge to authority, it may also be an opportunity to ask the bigger questions in the classroom. Relevance is not a secondary issue for learners; meaning and purpose are the double helix structure of the learning process and just as neuronal synapses and circuits connect brain structures to form mind, students need to make connections between the curriculum and their own life experiences.

When students begin to articulate their own big questions, we know that they are fully engaged in the process of finding out what is true. These ‘big questions’ often become their own road map of organizing principles that assemble people, opportunities, lessons and work into a life collage. Plato would have measured his students’ growth by their questions and not their answers. And while the answers are vital, the big questions, it seems to me, are even more vital because they are evidence of connection, learning, interest and real growth.

WHY OPENNESS MATTERS



by *[Alec Couros](#)*

My fascination with openness began more than a decade ago after reading Raymond's (1997) essay, *The Cathedral and the Bazaar*. The essay's central thesis, "Given enough eyeballs, all bugs are shallow", describes a socially-based theory of knowledge which, at the time, was used to highlight the collaborative methodologies employed by programmers to develop GNU/Linux. Raymond wrote, "who could have thought that even five years ago that a world-class operating system could coalesce as if by magic out of part-time hacking by several thousand developers scattered all over the planet, connected only by tenuous strands of the Internet?" (p. 17). A decade later, as we have seen the dramatic emergence of weblogs, wikis, microblogging, and other social media, it may not seem as 'magic' to those who have become accustomed to web collaboration. However, at the root of openness, lies an idea of central importance to educators of all subject areas, levels, and sectors: knowledge needs to be free.

There are opponents to this idea. Our knowledge economy is heavily influenced by industrial economy values and Lockean views on labour and property. For content producers who are compensated directly for sale of creative works, there are some valid arguments to protect work. However, for educators representing our public educational systems, there is little excuse for practice without a thoughtful approach to openness, sharing & transparency.

You see, it's not just about considering a Creative Commons (CC) license when you publish that next unit plan. And it's not just having students understand, utilize and add to the plethora of CC content found across the web. Nor is it simply about choosing an open access venue for that next publication. It's bigger than that. Openness is a culture, an ideology, and a methodology - it is about co-creating knowledge for the benefit of known and unknown others. It represents a better way for humans to work collaboratively on meaningful, shared pursuits.

WHY AUTONOMOUS LEARNING AND PLAY MATTERS



by [*Melanie McBride*](#)

They don't. Mostly because genuine autonomy has never been the goal of schooling or education. Cornelius Castoriadis, the philosopher of autonomy, defines autonomy as the 'voluntary' creation and enactment of one's own laws. The opposite of autonomy is 'heteronomy,' which is the state of being governed by external laws or structures. Or what Castoriadis refers to as 'extra-social authorities' (however imaginary, traditional or institutionalized). Autonomy is central to two things that we claim to care about in education: learning and play. Unfortunately, both learning and play are often defined according to 'purposive' and utilitarian rhetoric (i.e., production, performance, etc) that mislead us into thinking we are doing or supporting either. For in order for play or learning to be truly autonomous, a person must be in a position to reflect and make their own meaningful choices based on their own criteria - rather than deferring to an internalized or external authority or structure. I define the praxis of autonomy as: choice of play/learning objects (what), location/environment (where), time of day (when), selection of co-learner/players (who), personally defined approaches/processes (how) and finally, a meaningful interest or context for doing so (why). Though it is possible for learners to experience autonomy in school, they often must do so despite or in opposition to heteronomous requirements of their attention, energy, behaviour and interest. Furthermore, the teacher's identity as a power holder who is in a position to assess and evaluate the learner's behaviour or activities mediates what those learners choose to share, perform or engage by virtue of their authority within that space. No amount of prescribed 'engagement', play or productivity will ever reveal a learner's actual state of being simply because we claim. Having chosen to focus my research and graduate thesis on informal situated learning and play outside of schools, I believe that the more we learn about, support and enable autonomous play and learning, the more we can begin to structure our learning environments and instructional practices in accordance with the intrinsic will that compels us to action in the rest of our lives. But we need to start with ourselves (I has ideas!).

WHY DISTURBANCE MATTERS



by *Brenda Dyck*

"There aren't any teachers until there are learners, and there aren't any learners until something is disturbed in the student's world." ~ Jay Rosen (tribute to Neil Postman)

It is my belief that as educators, it is essential to embrace and bask in the presence of cognitive disturbance in our own learning and search out ways to integrate it into our role as a teacher.

Cognitive Disturbance, an impersonal term most educators relate to a dusty textbook from their learning past, often springs to life in the form of a flutter of discomfort that comes after reading or hearing something that doesn't align with what we think or believe. Anything but impersonal, this unsettling notion or strange perspective invites us on a journey to further exploration and an opportunity for personal and professional growth. It is essential for teachers to feel supported as they rethink something they really thought they knew or believed and to challenge their students to do the same.

Educators; parents, family, and close friends; and favorite authors and theorists have become Great Disturbers in my own life- people who have prevented me from getting too comfortable with what I think I know and the catalysts that have encouraged me to welcome questions and be suspicious of easy answers and one-sided perspectives. The best thing about Great Disturbers is how their influence stays with you long after the conversation or reading took place or as Joe Rosen mused about Neil Postman:

"He will always disturb me. He will always teach me."

If you're looking for an unavoidable Great Disturber, it is hard to beat the emergence of technology in the schoolhouse since technology calls into question the pedagogical beliefs and practices that teachers hold close to their heart and plant their flag on. The more important question in this place of disturbance centers on how do we navigate this discussion in an inclusive way so that credence is given to all parts of a healthy teaching ecosystem- the early adopters, the experimenters and yes, even the naysayers.

WHY COMPLEXITY MATTERS



by *[Clarence Fisher](#)*

Three years ago I received an email from a teacher in Rio de Janeiro telling me that one of her students had shared a few songs from her phone that one of my students had composed, recorded, and placed online. I pride myself on knowing my students well, on having a close connection with them, but I didn't know that this student had a creative side that he was sharing with the world.

That was fine though as far as my school was concerned because those skills didn't really count as learning. There was no way to place a value on the connections this student had, or on his creativity. The school was interested in if he could add fractions or answer questions about a piece of writing he had read, but my students who connected with nurses from Botswana to learn about their life in a village that had a 50% HIV infection rate, or with poverty activists in Bogota, weren't part of my institution's plan about what education and learning were like.

Yet, I believe that students working in ways like this are engaging the world more than was ever considered to be possible. Evaluating the biased views of ever shrinking news organizations and searching out real people to connect with is something our students must learn how to do. Having the skills to forge these connections - to think, and share, and create with other people around the globe is critical.

Growing these networks isn't easy. It takes time, skill and an understanding of how communities are built; all things our education system doesn't value because they are difficult to measure. Learning in a connected world is a complex enterprise that requires entirely new ways of measuring what counts as learning. It's easy to have our students answer the same questions on tests that we had to when we were kids. That system is predictable and safe. And it leaves our kids vulnerable in a changing world.

Chapter 4

I Wonder...



*Stephen Hurley, Kelly Power, Jeannine St. Amand, Alana Callan, Jen Deyenberg, Dean Shareski
[UnPlug'd Photo](#) by Chris Harbeck taken August 8th at Northern Edge Algonquin*



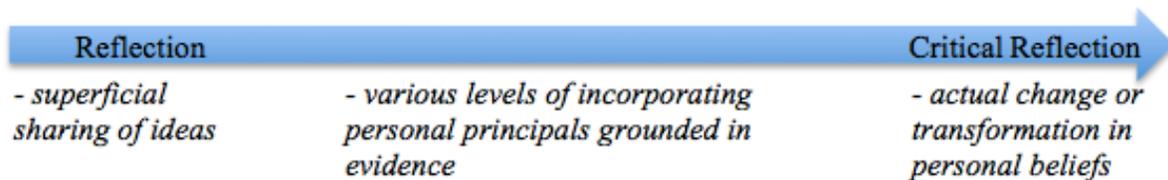
WHY CRITICAL REFLECTION MATTERS



by *Kelly Power*

There is a distinct difference between reflection and critical reflection. It always intrigues me when I hear someone talk about how they reflect. I can't help but wonder what their true purpose is.

I've come to an understanding that there is a continuum of critical reflection that begins with a lower level of reflection and advances forward to the deepest level of critical reflection that involves some sort of change in actions.



So you say you blog or journal as a means of reflecting and archiving your reflections. Have you deeply reflected on what your main purpose may be? Are you simply sharing information for the sake of sharing or are you a critically reflective practitioner for deeper reasons, for improvement of self?

Signs that it might be ego-driven:

- You feel that the more you write, the more others will learn from you
- Writing makes you feel good about who you are
- You constantly share your reflections with others and take pride because others read, comment and think you are so deep
- You check your blog statistics each day to see how many are now tuned into the “gospel of you”

Signs that it might be for personal transformation:

- You make your reflections private for awhile, between you and yourself
- You reflect on “what” you have learned today
- You understand “why” your experiences can bring you to a higher version of yourself through challenged principles
- You consider “how” to incorporate feedback from others
- You change what you do tomorrow based on what you have learned today
- You share your reflections when you are ready to be vulnerable and admit the transformation you have experienced

So where are you on the continuum? When you reflect critically, it must go beyond simply describing an experience. When you reflect critically there is action. And change. You cannot say that you critically reflect at the deepest level without some sort of change occurring that challenges your assumptions and beliefs.

Words on a computer screen or in a hand-written journal are just words.
But words do not define beliefs. Actions do.

I wonder where my critical reflection will bring me?

WHY FEAR MATTERS



by *[Alana Callan](#)*

Why fear matters?

“Fear. Good place to start.”¹

As I was writing this essay and getting ready for the [unplugd.ca](#) weekend I found I was full of anticipation and a little bit of fear... heck a lot of fear!

“Why am I going? Why did I get selected? What can I contribute?”

Fear can be a debilitating emotion but it can also be a strong motivator... so I’m trying to embrace my fears and not let them get in my way.

My artifact for submission was in the form of a story, a simple narrative about my learning journey and it included descriptive words such as: sharing, collaborating, thinking, participating, modeling, and reflecting. These are all words that I use, understand and believe in. These are the words I usually use when I start to talk about what learning means to me.

Learning is a personal journey; it has to be owned, it has to be authentic and meaningful to the individual, and one has to be willing and able to take the chances necessary to follow their heart/mind and be open to what new opportunities bring. Fear and discomfort can be a big part of the journey.

I say this as an adult who has come through the formal education system, works in it and supports the development of other adults (teachers) who are looking to develop their skills, refine their teaching techniques and/or design learning opportunities that go beyond the classroom walls.

And...

I am also a parent of a school age child who challenges my thinking and my confidence sometimes (most times) in what I know and what I mean and what I understand.

She makes me slow down, pay attention, play, show, share, listen, talk, animate, question, inquire, feel, cry, laugh and wonder.

Things happen very fast sometimes and you have to proceed more by feel and instinct rather than by common sense or common procedures. Sometimes things take longer than you planned or you go in a direction that you hadn't anticipated.

<http://youtu.be/oE4vKl2Y5No> or [here](#).

I wonder what learning and sharing would like if we let fear get in the way.

WHY TRUST MATTERS



by Jeannine St. Amand

As a parent involved in public education governance I've learned there is a lot of mistrust in our system - in our vision, our beliefs, our decisions, our actions, and our desire for change.

I've learned:

Some parents don't trust that teachers are delivering the right mix of content and skills and giving every child in the classroom the attention needed to reach their potential.

Some parents don't trust that administrators are ensuring teachers are equipped with the right resources and training to deliver the curriculum.

Some parents don't trust that bureaucrats have designed a curriculum that balances breadth and depth and respects the past while preparing for the future.

Some parents don't trust that policy makers have the education of children as their primary goal when allocating funding to programs.

And some parents don't trust that students are responsible enough to lead their own learning.

With so much mistrust what must we do so that parents will come to understand our desire for change? We must build relationships. We must communicate in an open, honest and respectful manner. We must be transparent in our own learning. We must discuss our fears and recognize the fears of parents and work together to overcome them. We must share our struggles to break the habits of how we learned to do things and encourage parents to see how knowledge can be constructed in new ways. We must show the power of networks to improve the lives of adults, and then show them the power of learning networks for their children. We must be transparent in our actions, honest in our words and accept parents for where they are in their learning journey.

Imagine if we respect parents enough to connect, communicate, collaborate and create with them so that they may understand the power of our vision, our beliefs, our actions and our tools. I wonder how I can use my voice to build more trust and include parents in transforming learning?

WHY JOY MATTERS



by *[Dean Shareski](#)*

Today, more than ever our students often experience of a lifetime of heartbreak, disasters and disappointments before they even arrive at school. When school could be the best part of their day, it's simply another negative experience. I wonder if we ever ask ourselves, "Where's the joy?"

I've been in too many schools; too many classrooms where smiles and joy are hard to come by. The pressure and business of learning seems to be sucking the joy out of our schools. While there is much that needs to be done in our institutions and curriculum to address this problem, there is much that can be done in classrooms and by teachers that can bring joy back into our classrooms.

Alfie Kohn talks about joy being not a means to an end, but an end in itself. As a classroom teacher I recall having students in my classroom whose files were filled with a myriad of problems and challenges that quite frankly overwhelmed me. Academically they had mountains to climb. I wasn't sure I could help the children meet all those challenges but I also noticed that joy was certainly missing from their school experience. So even if they came late to school, or were non-compliant, my goal was to ensure they knew that they mattered and that my classroom was a place to smile.

It has become more and more difficult to consider the role of joy in our schools. Teachers have been told other things matter more: test scores, new curriculum, district initiatives and other data that suggests deficiencies.

Is anyone measuring for joy? A joyful learning environment might be the most important thing you create for a child. If indeed the much used phrase "lifelong learner" is a major goal for schools, could joy be an ingredient for that?

Maybe we ought to start counting smiles. If at the end of the year, you can honestly say your students leave as joyful learners, you'll be among the best teachers I know.

I wonder what I did today to bring joy into my world?

WHY VIDEO GAMES MATTER



by Jen Deyenberg

What if there were a tool that guided you through challenges and quests at your own pace?

What if the tool scaffolded learning through hints and clues available to you just when you needed them?

What if the tool assessed how you were doing and didn't let you progress until you have sufficient tools, skills, and preparation to go on?

What if the tool provided a safe environment for you to fail in, but encouraged and motivated you to keep trying?

What if the tool was full of rich narrative driven content?

What if the tool had characters that drew you in and inspired you to create, wonder, and play?

What if you were rewarded automatically for progress and success?

What if the tool could simulate things that weren't possible?

What if there were puzzles and challenges that played to the most critical thinking and problem solving skills?

What if there was rich, descriptive text, with more words than most novels, which you were eager to read to keep progressing?

What if there was beautiful art, rich texture, colour, and pattern to inspire your own creations?

What if you absolutely loved the tool, and played with it every chance with you got?

What if the tool were available in many platforms, portable, accessible, affordable, already in many homes, and had more choices of content than you could ever imagine?

What if you could develop your own challenges and share them with others around the world?

What if you could create new levels, characters, worlds, and write all about your experiences, create stories about these new worlds, and write how to guides to help others?

What if you could share your creations in online communities and even play with other people from around the world, connecting with others?

What if we brought it into the classroom? I wonder...

WHY THE ARTS MATTER



by *[Stephen Hurley](#)*

We live in a period where our schools have become somewhat calcified by an approach to learning that doesn't leave a whole lot to the imagination. Fortunately, passionate conversations are beginning that wonder out loud about the role of arts education in helping to make our schools more responsive to the needs of all students.

Put aside the idea that quality arts programs can be a source of engagement for students who may be otherwise disconnected from the school experience. Put aside the idea that the arts can help boost academic achievement in students. And put aside the notion that exposure to the arts can affect brain development in people of all ages. While all of these reasons are part of a resurgence in arts advocacy across many jurisdictions, they don't capture the one really compelling reason arts education should matter to those who are interested in quality education.

Above and beyond everything else, the arts open the door to imagination and creativity, and offer them a place at the table! Engagement in visual arts, drama, dance, music and media production provide students rich opportunities to see and think about the world in new and inventive ways. In this way, the arts offer us a way to nurture imagination; when that imagination is given a voice and is communicated to others in some form, we move into the realm of creativity.

The arts not only offer students a safe place to explore their world from a variety of perspectives, but quality arts programs also provide the skills necessary to communicate those perspectives to others in powerful ways. In a very real sense, the arts represent a dynamic set of languages that enable us to read and write the world in ways that extend beyond traditional text.

For some of our students this will deepen and enliven their literacy lives. But for the many students who do not effectively connect with the more traditional text forms that tend to define school success, strong arts programs will become a critical part of their literacy lives.

The work of imagination and creativity creates an open space for possibility and alternatives. At its very core, it is work that is hopeful and forward-looking.

In this process, new possibilities are born, new ideas and practices take root and the connection between schooling and education becomes stronger.

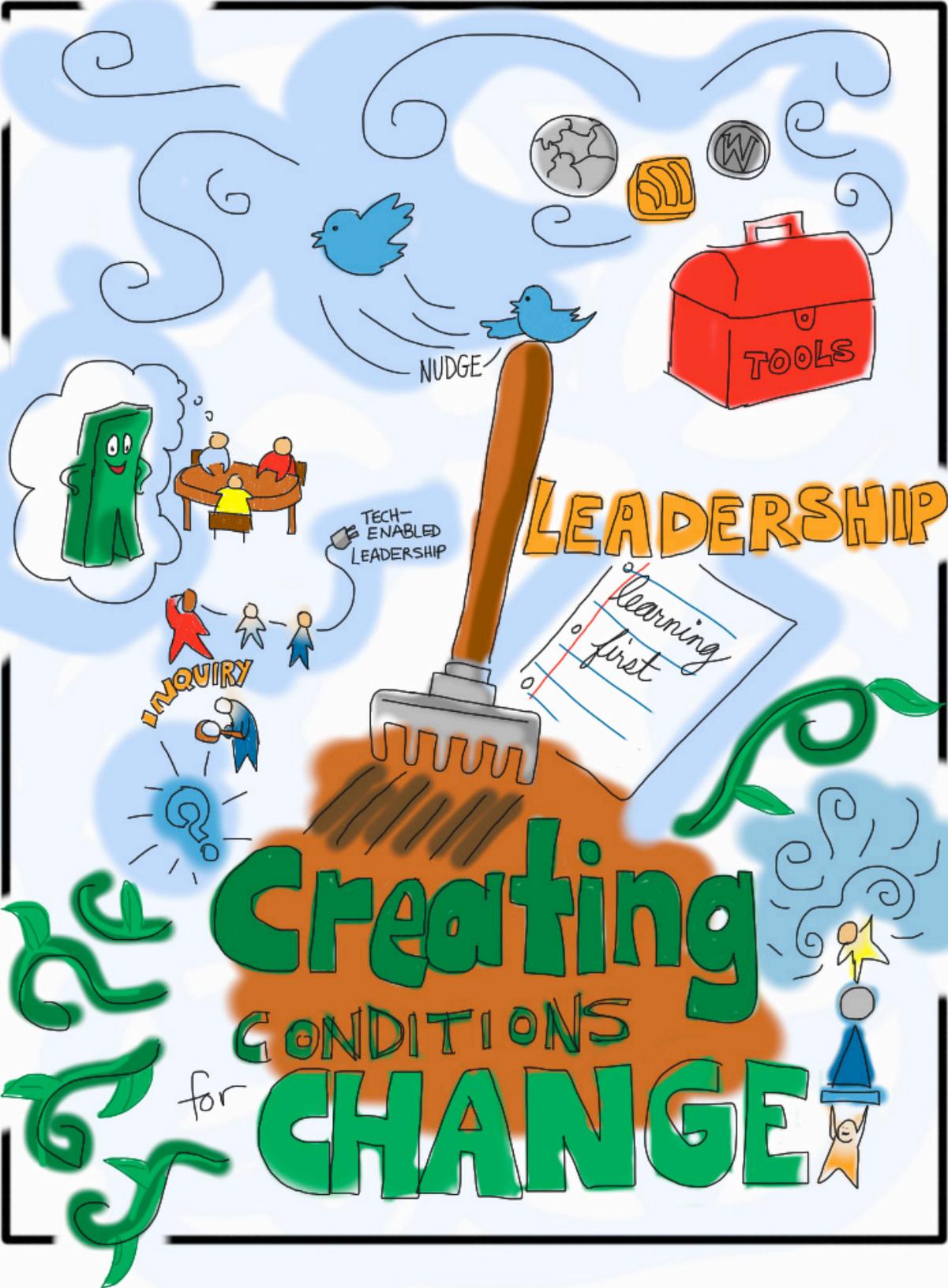
I wonder what will emerge when we allow ourselves to expand our conception of literacy to embrace the language of the arts.

Chapter 5

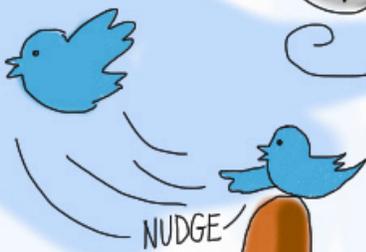
Creating Conditions for Change



*Kimberley Crawford, Vince Macdonald, Tom Fullerton, Lisa Neale, Rob Fisher, Camille Rutherfordk
[UnPlug'd Photo](#) by Chris Harbeck taken August 8th at Northern Edge Algonquin*



LEADERSHIP



TECH-ENABLED LEADERSHIP



Creating
CONDITIONS
for
CHANGE



WHY LEARNING FIRST AND LEADING SECOND MATTERS



by [*Lisa Neale*](#)

A lot has changed in my lifetime. I didn't grow up with a computer or the Internet. In fact, all of my formal K - 12 learning was unplugged.

In this digital age, we are plugged in and wired more than ever. I cannot imagine my personal or professional life without technology and the Internet. Can you? In today's ever-changing world, digital tools are transforming everything we do. Every day our learning becomes more digital, more mobile, and more multimedia. The ways we connect, communicate, collaborate and create are more than ever done online and in a networked way.

How do we lead the way, manage constant change and create a culture of continuous learning for all?

Today's leaders must not only be comfortable with change, they must be excited by it. Being a successful leader in the 21st century involves being open to change and most importantly building relationships with others as you work and learn in a world that is ever-changing.

As an educational leader, I am present as a learner alongside my staff, students, parents, colleagues and community. This means that I roll up my sleeves, pay full attention and am a participant in the learning. I ask questions, take risks, plan and reflect with others. Collaborative inquiry is the learning process that guides us in creating together a continuous culture of learning. As a leader, I invest time, care and build trust with people.

Recently when working with a principal and her staff co-creating plans for designing a learning commons space, the questions being asked mattered more than finding the answers. Listening attentively and welcoming the resistance generated rich dialogue and full participation of all.

I am a connected leader who uses many tools and social media to construct learning experiences. How, when, and where I learn is my choice. My learning and leading is visible, transparent and tech-savvy. This goes hand in hand with how the real world works and how people lead their lives.

Leading by learning is the key in today's digital age. Being a passionate learner who is self-directed and comfortable not being the expert inspires others to be lead learners with you. It's okay to not know and in fact, that's what makes creating a culture of continuous learning become real. Being an open learner who is a problem-solver, critical thinker and first and foremost a collaborator brings to life the creative power of all

Leaders must always be learning and understand that learning is the work that brings us together. And that's why creating a culture of continuous learning matters.

WHY TEACHER INQUIRY MATTERS



by [Tom Fullerton](#)

When we change our practice, we change who we are.

Through teacher inquiry, we better understand ourselves and our practice. The inquiry process involves deeply questioning who we are both personally and professionally. It involves exploring a dual identity, that of teacher and learner. Teacher inquiry invites us to engage in a cycle of action and reflection: to critically reflect on our practice; question our assumptions about teaching and learning; draw on theory to better inform the decisions we make every day and to develop a plan of action. Essentially, it is a personal inquiry into teaching and the object of our research is ourselves.

As we engage in inquiry, it is important to take the time to archive those moments when learning becomes visible, to carve out the space where learning becomes practice. It isn't enough to think about it on the car ride home. You have to actually do it. Create it. Share it. A process portfolio acts as this archive. It is a record of learning, supported by evidence selected from reflections, journal writings, archives of peer conversations, comments on blog posts or student work. When we take the time to collect artifacts of our learning, we are better positioned to communicate new knowledge to the wider educational community. Our portfolios give us the signposts to look back at our learning over time. It allows us to make visible the evolution of our practice.

The process of change comes through sustained conversations over time. There are no easy fixes to the challenges we face in education. When we adopt a disposition towards inquiry and create a community of practice at the school and district level, it creates a culture of learning that pervades the community. When we shift to a learning focus, we open the channels of communication and decision-making. Articulating a shared vision for ongoing professional development allows us to direct the change we want to see.

Imagine the effect of all members of the educational community adopting a disposition towards inquiry. Imagine what would happen if we shifted our stance from imposing external teacher evaluation frameworks to learning alongside classroom practitioners.

WHY TECH ENABLED LEADERSHIP MATTERS



by *Camille Rutherford*

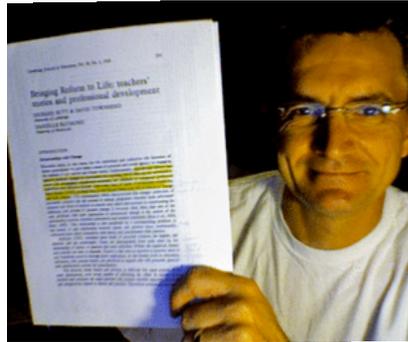
With the exception of E-mail, the toolbox of resources available to school leaders has remained virtually unchanged for the last twenty-five years. Despite the previously slow pace of change, a new generation of leadership tools that include blogs, wikis, and RSS feeds, appear to have the potential to significantly alter the who and how of leadership practice, and rapidly disrupt previous notions of school leadership.

These new leadership resources, that are often labelled ‘social media’, have already demonstrated that they are capable of disrupting traditional patterns of knowledge management and information distribution. One needs to only look to the impact of Wikipedia and blogs on the information and news industries to grasp the disruptive nature of these resources.

When harnessed as a leadership tool, these social media resources may have the potential to disrupt the traditional distribution of leadership and how leaders influence followers. Just as recent technological advances have changed traditional notions of the workplace and collaboration by creating a flat world where telecommuting across time zones and collaborating across continents is possible, technology-enabled leadership has the potential to alter school leadership to the point that it warrants the label “leadership 2.0.”

The designation 2.0 is generally associated with web applications that afford greater levels of user interaction, collaboration, and engagement than the static, pre-millennium internet. It is also commonly used by computer programmers to highlight an incremental improvement in software code that is built on the strengths of a previous version. Consequently, leadership 2.0 can be considered a new iteration of leadership practice that goes beyond traditional models of static leadership that were often opaque and hierarchical to facilitate leadership practices that are open, collaborative and dynamic in nature.

WHY BEING PLASTIC MATTERS



by *Vince Macdonald*

I have been thinking a lot about my Mom and the important need for simplicity in learning. My mother was a student in a one room school house in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia in the 1930's on a small country road....where she brought her milk to school each day in a glass bottle.....and placed the bottle in the brook to stay cool until lunch. She had two teachers – twin sisters – who engaged her in meaningful lessons about humanity and civics.....teachers who continued to nurture a relationship even into their 97th year of life. This was a time of beautiful simplicity and student engagement with important lessons for all persons to be open to growth.

I offer this narrative since it evokes the notion of situated learning and ensuring that we host regular conversations with our teachers....professional learning and cognitive apprenticeships that are rooted in project-based learning. I envision the metaphor of a kitchen table.....where all teachers feel welcomed to actively inform an intentional focus on quality learning. I firmly believe that there is an important need for regular dialogue in our schools. How often do we gather around our kitchen tables for a simple focus on the real needs of our school systems?

In my view, there is an important need to nurture the development of students in classrooms with engaged learners who are actively involved in knowing the purpose of their learning....with classrooms that proceed from careful planning.....with learning that is socially constructed....we need an intentional focus on this knowing-doing gap. How many of our classrooms engage in practices that allow for the social construction of knowledge?.....in a participation framework?.....in which learning is mediated by the perspectives of the collective group and an embedded focus on purposeful talk? I believe that our classrooms can become more constructivist through dialogue, explicit feedback, monitoring and coaching.

I believe that we need to be plastic and learn from our experiences.....to be malleable and change our professional practices. A one room schoolhouse was the important core of education in the life of my mother.....and she conveyed to me the salience of growth and adaptability. My question is this, “How are we plastic and malleable as teachers? What meaningful questions do we bring to our practices? What are we measuring when we evaluate and scaffold learning?”

WHY BEING A SUPPORTIVE PRINCIPAL MATTERS



by [*Rob Fisher*](#)

Actually I think everything matters. What I'm suggesting is that because we never really know for sure what impact our actions will have on our students, or teachers, everything we do matters. Please see [my story](#) as an example of what I'm thinking.

But this essay was supposed to be about administrators, specifically principals and technology infusion so being a supportive principal matters.

But what matters most?

Principals should find, collaborate, and assist teachers with projects that are real, authentic, and sometimes have a social justice theme. Projects that in some way make a difference in the world. Collaborative projects allow us to connect with people on a common quest. Tapping into our social networks and facilitating collaboration among teachers should be something all principals strive to do.

And to do this we need to re-think how we interpret curricular outcomes. We should see content or knowledge outcomes as a suggested starting point, and not an end or goal in and of themselves.

Does it really matter what a grunion is? I can see a few of you zipping over to Wikipedia to check it out. My point is that the clusters or specific content mentioned in provincial curricula are meant to be a beginning to help students generate their own questions (and then provide a framework onto which inquiry and technology infusion can attach itself).

It amazes me that when I have discussions with people involved in developing provincial curriculum they will say things like "of course people don't make a list of curricular outcomes

and check them off when done" to which I reply "that's exactly what we do." In fact I think many teachers feel it's their responsibility to do so.

Principals need to create safe space in their schools and allow teachers to see knowledge outcomes as guidelines, and encourage teachers to achieve higher order thinking skills with their students. We should be doing things that really matter. We should be providing opportunities for students to gather and make sense (critical thinking) and to produce and show understanding (creative thinking) and infuse technology in the process of doing so.

WHY A NUDGE MATTERS



by [Kim Crawford](#)

Educators need a nudge to face the ways that information technology and access to information have transformed the world and should be transforming teaching and learning. We've been too gentle with our expectation that instructional practice change.

A colleague of mine once joked that our jobs as curriculum coordinators would be easier if we said...

If you spend most of your teaching time in front of your class, talking, stop. Please, just stop.

But it isn't that simple. Change requires a lot of support, so we design learning opportunities for educators like instructional coaching, co-planning and co-teaching, and collaborative inquiry. By most accounts, these models of professional learning have been successful at improving professional dialogue and collaboration, and moving teacher practice out from behind closed doors. Shifts in instruction occur where sustained support is provided, but the significant, large-scale changes in instruction still elude us.

We need a nudge.

Richard H. Thaler, the author of *Nudge* explains that

A nudge can clear away the fog and help to set a course.

A well designed nudge helps people make better decisions.

Better decisions equal better outcomes.

How is this for a nudge? A school sets a strategic goal that by the end of 3 years, all students will have access to the Internet all of the time. Wireless Internet will be available anywhere in the school. Students will be able to use their devices, or school devices, on tests, exams, projects, and

during class.

How would assessments change?

How would instruction change?

One thing is certain. It would have to.

A nudge might bring us to a place where we finally enact and bring to scale, the kind of changes to instruction we spend so much time discussing. *We cannot change everything we face, but we cannot change anything unless we face it (James Baldwin)*. And facing anything is easier when we have support. Educators need a nudge to transform teaching and learning, but not without a **safety network** of people we trust.

Chapter 6

Empowering Self - Empowering Others



*(Rear) Ben Hazzard, Sherrie Buchner, Alanna King, (Front) Heather Durnin, Danika Barker, John Evans
[UnPlug'd Photo](#) by Chris Harbeck taken August 8th at Northern Edge Algonquin*



VISION



ONLINE COLLABORATION

PASSION

EMPOWER

SHARE

VULNERABLE

SELF

DIGITAL PRESENTATION



EMPOWERING

OTHERS

WHY VISION IN EDUCATION MATTERS



by *[Alanna King](#)*

Just before the bell goes, he throws down his backpack and pulls out his tablet, his phone and his earbuds and turns on the library computer. He plugs into the jack on the front of the PC and waits. Waits for the login prompt. Waits for the homepage to load. But meanwhile he's checking in with his group who are at Tim Horton's because they knew they were going to have a supply teacher but forgot to tell him. No matter, they chatted about their upcoming presentation while watching SNL over the weekend so they'll be ready. Once the internet is up he opens a window and logs in to YouTube to check out the song he's going to use in his drama presentation. Because there isn't any flash-based app on the tablet, he logs into Facebook, leaves a message on their group project wall telling everyone that he would at least appreciate a double-double, quickly jumps over to Cityville to collect rent and feels the cold bony fingers of the supply teacher on his shoulder. The regular teacher has been absent for every Tuesday this semester in order to participate in some PD work at the board office.

"I want you to log off right now. You're wasting time."

"But I'm just working on my group project!"

"No, get off now. I can see that you're on Facebook and on YouTube at the same time. "

"Well the librarian doesn't mind, so why do you?"

Vision in education matters because students won't function well with the mixed messages they're getting from school every day.

WHY PASSION MATTERS



by *Danika Barker*

I am a bad teacher.

I procrastinate and daydream when I should be lesson-planning and finding ways to address the myriad of curriculum expectations I'm supposed to be covering in my classes. I am very good at finding ways to avoid marking assignments and put off developing rubrics. I've managed to avoid disaster, however, through my last-minute ability to suppress that compulsion to write stories, and paint pictures, and make-believe.

And while I was good at the game of school, I wasn't really a good student either. I was involved in community theatre when I was in high school so I'd spend hours pretending to be other people. When I wasn't doing that, I was probably hanging out in the art room painting and drawing imagined realities, or hiding in my bedroom writing what I thought would be the next great Canadian novel--while my history essay or chemistry homework sat abandoned in my locker. But I was good enough at the game of school to pull it together at the last minute--perhaps not achieving my full "potential," but certainly doing well enough that no one gave me a hard time about it.

For the longest time I saw this tendency toward play as a character defect. Now I'm starting to think that the system that discourages play and imagination and making mistakes might be the defect. Some of my best learning has occurred while immersing myself in another world either through theatre or creative writing or visual arts.

Why can't school be a place where teachers and students are allowed to play and take risks and make mistakes without their passions being seen as character defects?

WHY AUTHENTICITY MATTERS



by *[Ben Hazzard](#)*

Have you ever wondered if the person you are portraying online aligns with who you are in your professional or personal life?

A long time ago people gathered around fires and told stories. The lighting wasn't great, so the drawings on the rock walls were abandoned and more descriptive language and tone was used to engage the audience. Using digital tools, authors now have more control about what they say, or will not say but non-verbal cues that provide context are minimized.

Digital tools give authors more control over what is expressed but these messages are easily misunderstood. So 'digital presentation of self' matters because we are using a new set of tools to present ourselves to previously inaccessible audiences while deciding if we are true to our authentic self.

So I wonder: How might a changing audience, made possible with digital tools, influence our actions?

The circle around the fire has grown and the sharing is archived. We can span geographic regions to find an audience based on interest, experience, or ideas. We are no longer limited to being in the moment. We are in the moment, but what we have shared digitally is available for others to see and may very well be available for future generations to see.

So I wonder: How does archiving our presentation of self change our identity?

But are you really who you say you are? New audiences with more powerful tools have left us with the same question that emerged thousands of years ago: is the self being presented

authentically or artificially? The audience and author must critically view the core messages that we are sharing; regardless of the tool to ensure it is authentic.

So I wonder: What influence can we, as educators, have on our own school communities by modeling authenticity in our personal and professional communications?

WHY ONLINE STUDENT COLLABORATION MATTERS



by *[Heather Durnin](#)*

Online student collaboration harnesses the positive influence of social media and allows students to begin a digital footprint that will help them become responsible global internet participants. Every time we have a conversation with others, we open new opportunities to grow and to learn. Through experience, I've come to realize that as students participate in online communities on collaborative projects, their interactions have been one of the most valuable parts of their learning.

Throughout the process, students use critical thinking to evaluate, defend and share resources, creating a product in the process. Their growing communication skills helps students reflect on their learning, as well as develop metacognition skills which support the goal of becoming a self-directed, lifelong learner.

As one student reflects,

“To me this project was a lot more than just trying to get a good grade. Because our project was successful, despite some minor setbacks along the way, I think we’ve paved the way for a new generation of learning. No longer will students have to choose groups from their own classroom. Teachers now have the opportunity to assign group members from thousands of miles away, and that to me is extraordinary.” Shawn K., Grade 8

Using communication technology in authentic learning opportunities supports student growth as life-long learners. Web 2.0 tools and social media sites help students connect with other students and professionals around the globe, tapping into the knowledge of millions as they develop their own personal learning network.

Learning is most authentic when it is developed from the communities outside of the school. In his book, *Creating Tomorrow's Schools Today*, [Richard Gerver](#) writes, “if the story comes solely

from teachers it will always feel make believe; if it comes from all of us it can be real.” It’s our role as teachers to provide the resources and teach effective literacies of online communication. We must also create reflective learners who are able to recognize the values in learning alongside others. This allows students to see how the outside world can help define their stories.

Bibliography

Gerver, R. (2010) *Creating Tomorrow’s Schools Today*, London: Continuum International Publishing Group

WHY SHARING MATTERS



by *[John Evans](#)*

In ancient times, the sharing of the basic necessities of life meant survival. It evolved into the sharing of stories as a means to transmit knowledge of people, places and things. Today, the aspect of sharing is often thought of as a basic skill which we teach our children in the earliest stages of infancy all the way through to adulthood. Anyone who has any type of relationship with a child has certainly uttered the phrase “Now share nicely!”

Now we come to the art of teaching where traditionally teachers have independently developed lessons and activities for the students in their care. Some have reluctance to share with others because they fear their work might be critiqued, while still others feel the effort they put into their lessons is for their use only, let others do this work themselves.

Yet for many years there has been another group of teachers who decided that through sharing and collaboration they can develop better lessons and, as a result have stretched their own thinking and pedagogy in new ways. This isn't really new; it's happened in schools around the globe for years amongst willing teachers but with today's social software platforms it has become far easier to do so with the teacher down the hall, across town, and around the globe. These teachers are finding that their technology enable professional learning networks affords them opportunities for their own learning and inevitably that of their students that is far greater than they could ever have accomplished on their own.

By sharing our ideas, resources, successes and yes our failures too, it allows others to learn alongside of us. It develops our own world views, skills and attitudes and can make us far better teachers and individuals. It is through the act of sharing that we show our humanity. That's why sharing matters.

WHY UNPLUGGING MATTERS



by *[Sherrie Buchner](#)*

I started writing this as I was breathing-in the scents of fresh basil and the Ontario lakeside air, listening to the sounds of birds chirping and relaxed real-life conversations of some of the most influential and innovating educators in Canada. These are the people whose blogs, videos, twitter feeds, and replies motivate, challenge and teach me every day, most of whom I have only met or learned from online. This group that usually congregates online is meeting face-to-face in an unplugged-from-internet-and-phone weekend of collaboration with a goal of creating a vision for Canadian education.

When I had learned that we were going to have to write something and share it for the Canadian Education Summit I wanted to back out and I panicked. I am not a risk taker, though I strive to be every day.

The editing process frustrated me at first because I didn't get the criticism that I needed and I had expectations that the connections here were going to tell me something that I didn't already know. I didn't have anything to share that anyone else here hadn't already done or experienced. But sharing without distraction is part of the point of the process.

We found a tranquil location to meet, and Ben reminded me that we need to be willing to share our vulnerabilities, be transparent and show our true selves. Danika, Ben and Alanna reminded me that we need to drop our egos. That's what I came here for - the honest and open debate in a safe atmosphere that is not a stuffy hotel conference room and for reminders, validation and new thoughts of what's important in education .. and in life. I need to be challenged to grow and learn. I need to spend time with like-minds and people I admire. I need to be present in the moment. I learned that I need to arrange more time for intentional introspection and reflection - to rediscover my passions. In our collaborative process my needs were met.

As I sit and reflect under this mighty maple tree, I'm listening a little closer to the voice in my head.

When I leave this summit and go back to my home I'm going to make a major life change after only two days of being unplugged and collaborating.

Time away from outside connectivity can open up opportunities for different kinds of personal connections. You can sit back, contemplate, reflect, clear the clutter from your thoughts, re-align your compass, and soak it all in while your personal batteries are recharging.

What Matters Most?

At the heart of the many topics considered at UnPlug'd, you'll find personal stories. During the summit, each delegate shared a narrative that brought a *'blank'* to life. These short stories were shared without notes, and were recorded during our time at Northern Edge. In following links to the videos, readers can meet many of the passionate Canadian learners who took part in the inaugural UnPlug'd summit.

AN ARCHIVE OF STORIES SHARED AT UNPLUG'D



[George's Story](#)



[Daryl's Story](#)



[Shelley's Story](#)



[Ben's Story](#)



[Bryan's Story](#)



[Stephen's Story](#)



[Rodd's Story](#)



[Andy's Story](#)



[Zoe's Story](#)



[Heather's Story](#)



[Chris' Story](#)



[Vince's Story](#)



[Andy's Story](#)



[Kim's Story](#)



[Danika's Story](#)



[Kim's Story](#)



[John's Story](#)



[Darren's Story](#)



[Kathy's Story](#)



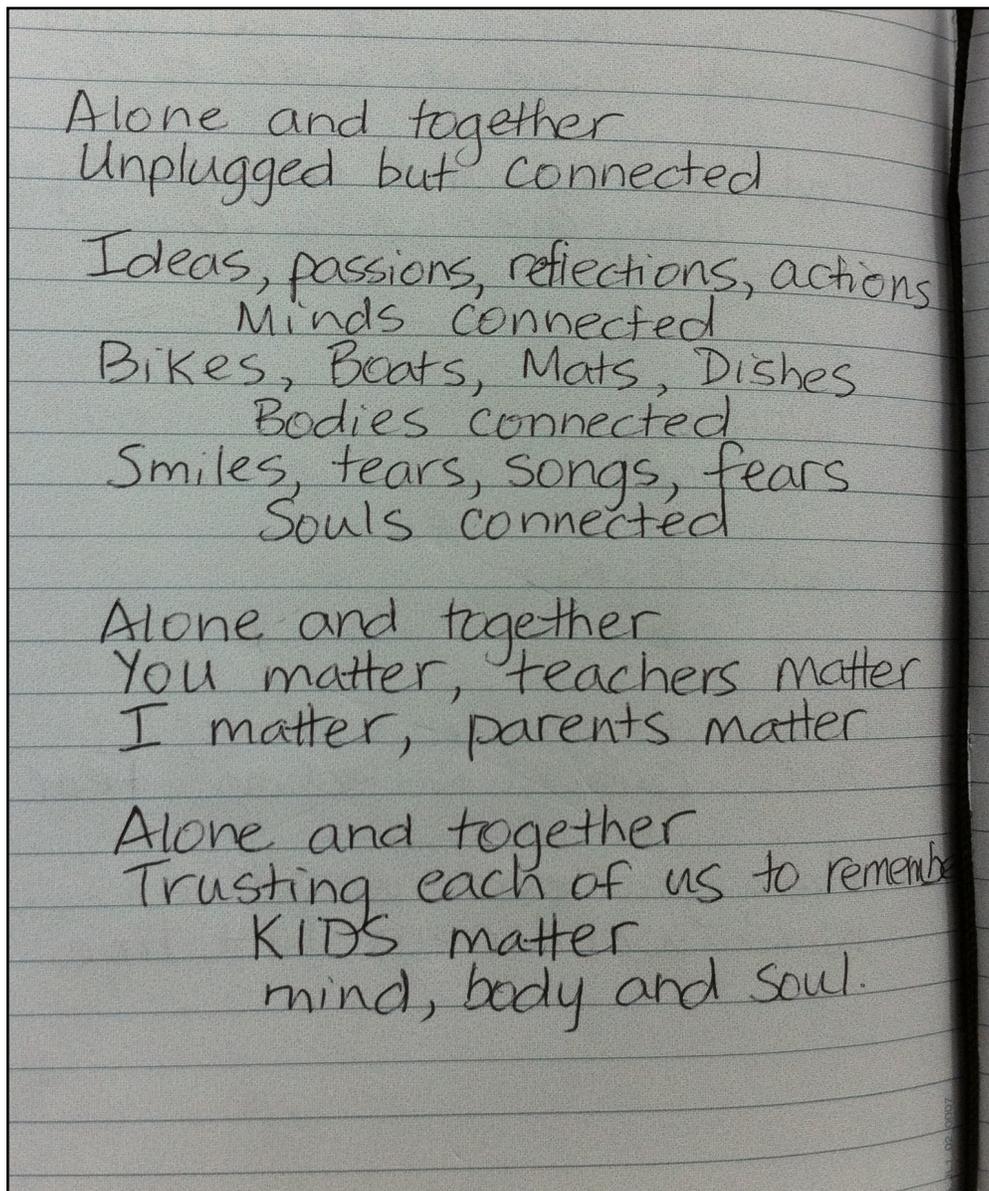
[Alanna's Story](#)



[Rob's Story](#)

*Stories shared at Northern Edge Algonquin
during UnPlug'd: Canadian Education Summit
August 7th - August 8th, 2011*

A LAST WORD



Shared by Jeannine St. Amand

Butterfly Room, Northern Edge Algonquin

Final Circle Sharing, August 8, 2011



UnPlug'd Photo taken by Alec Couros, shared by Heather Durnin, August 6th at Northern Edge Algonquin

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