

[Education Week's blogs](#) > [Finding Common Ground](#)

Connected Education Might Not Mean What You Think

By [Peter DeWitt](#) on October 6, 2013 9:00 AM

This month has been designated "[Connected Educator](#)" Month by the [U.S Department of Education](#). Most of us who considered ourselves connected educators write about technology and social networking frequently, or at least during months other than one designated for connected learning.

That kind of speaks to how we all feel about technology. It hasn't replaced anything but it has enhanced it. Whether it's the way we communicate with teachers, students or parents, through [flipping faculty meetings](#) and [parent communication](#), or how we as professionals interact with one another, technology has helped us grow.

Not because technology is the flavor of the month but because it literally has enhanced every aspect of our job. I Tweet with people I respect and e-mail back and forth with experts that I have long valued their work. We blog about ideas and hear from people who live around the world. Technology makes that happen.

For the past few years I have expanded my professional learning network (PLN) through Twitter. My PLN send out articles and blogs, we support each other when we are having a difficult time in our profession and help stretch each other's thinking around issues.

Social networking has numerous chat sessions where we engage in debate or collaborate on ideas. The friends who were once a picture on a screen are people we see at conferences and begin to text or talk with by phone.

The Downside

I'm not going to lie, there are parts that I dislike about technology. I hate getting in arguments through e-mail and regret when a teacher or parent reads an e-mail in a way that I didn't intend. The first thing I do in the morning after I grab a cup of coffee is check e-mail and I don't like reading the ones that only tell me about a problem.

I have actually asked my staff not to read e-mails after a certain time at night. It's not a directive but a suggestion. Many used to read e-mails before they went to bed, and would get upset and not sleep when they received a negative one from a parent or colleague. A few years ago that happened too many times, so I stopped checking e-mail after 7:30 and waited until I woke up in the morning with fresh eyes.

I still like to pick up the phone or walk down the hall to have a real conversation. I also don't like when I walk into a restaurant and see people sitting together but texting to others. And I'm not a fan of the guy who almost hit me on the highway because he was tailgating one car and texting as he did it.

In addition, I don't like how Google and Facebook streamline all of my searches so that I only see the things "*I like*." Watch Eli Pariser's great Ted Talk called [Beware of the Online Filter Bubbles](#) for more information on that.

However...if I didn't do something based on how others do it wrong or to the extreme, I probably would never try anything new.

Mid-Life Career Change

Blogging has been a life changing experience for some people. It certainly has for me. I remember an episode of the Cosby Show (yes, I'm that old) when I was growing up. Theo was explaining to his dad that one of his friends didn't just study by using books his teachers gave, he actually read the books that were referenced in the books he was using to study. Blogging has helped us reach that level of brilliance because we can include links in our blogs, much like I did above.

Connected learning is so much more than using a computer, smartphone or tablet...it's how we use those tools. The old argument that schools should not use it as a way to communicate with families because many families don't have access to computers is an argument that needs to go away. In a [Huffington Post Tech](#) blog it was said that *"The U.N. telecom agency says there were about 6 billion subscriptions by the end of 2011 - roughly one for 86 of every 100 people."*

It's true that not everyone has access, and for those people we have to send paper copies and communicate in different ways. Maybe some of them will begin to use computers or tablets to communicate with schools if we make our communication more engaging. I see too many parents with their smartphones to believe that most people don't have them.

In the End

This is Connected Educator month. We don't have to be Bill Gates or Steve Jobs to get on a computer and try something new. Connected education isn't about being brilliant when it comes to technology but it is about trying something for the first time. Perhaps it means trying Touchcast on your iPad or using Glogster for the first time with your students, or maybe it just means that you finally join Twitter or Facebook to see what friends are up to or meet some new colleagues and create a PLN.

You can still hold on to the parts of technology you don't like but I bet with an open mind you will find some aspects that you really enjoy.

Connect with Peter on [Twitter](#).

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