

GET CONNECTED!

USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR
SCHOOL SUCCESS



INTRODUCTION

Start the school year off right with free chapters from *What Connected Educators Do Differently* by Todd Whitaker, Jeffrey Zoul, and Jimmy Casas and *Dealing with Difficult Parents, Second Edition* by Todd Whitaker and Douglas J. Fiore! Read about embracing the three Cs: communication, collaboration and community, and about taking your classroom social. Specifically, in this pack you'll learn more about:

- What it means to communicate with purpose and tell your school's story using a variety of social media tools and a personal and professional learning network;
- What it means to passionately collaborate with other educators in your school, district, and beyond;
- Leveraging technology to tell your school's story; and
- Using social media to communicate positively, widely, and effectively with parents!

As a **BONUS**, enclosed also are related discussion questions for chapter 5 of *Dealing with Difficult Parents, Second Edition*. There's also a study guide for the book *Your First Year: How to Survive and Thrive as a New Teacher* by Todd Whitaker, Katherine Whitaker, and Madeline Whitaker for teachers who are just beginning their careers!

Happy summer reading!



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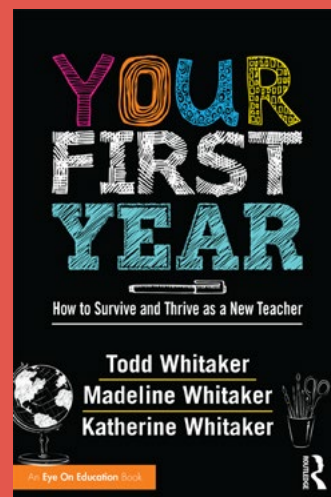
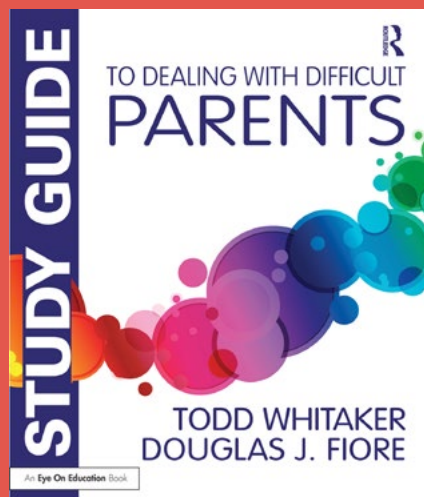
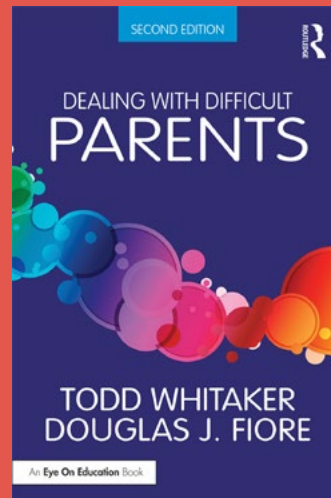
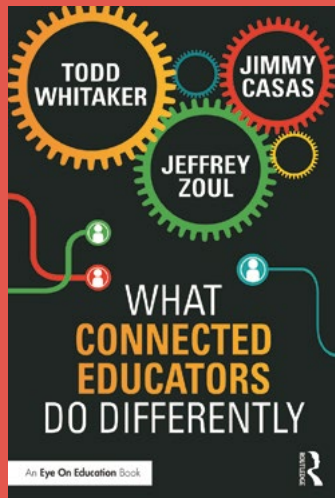
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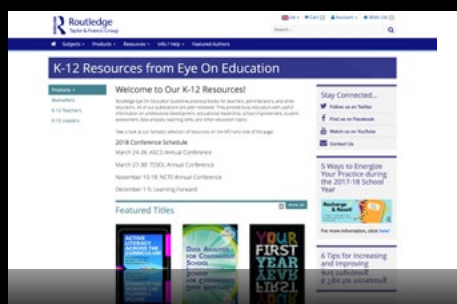
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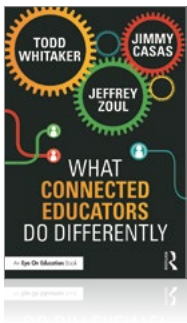


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The following is excerpted from *What Connected Educators Do Differently* by Todd Whitaker, Jeffrey Zoul, Jimmy Casas.

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The 21st-century educator leads and models teaching and learning through connected, reflective, transparent, and collaborative methods. Such educators recognize that the educational landscape has changed with continuous advances in technology and see the benefits of transforming their role from a traditional isolated learner to a connected learner through the use of social media tools and a personal and professional learning network. They understand how connections developed through social media support them in cultivating a connected positive school culture and establishing a brand presence that extends far beyond the walls of their school community. They strive to build communities that currently do not exist, by communicating and collaborating with all members of the school community inside and outside their immediate circles in ways that foster cultures of excellence, in which everyone has the opportunity to become a part of something great.

It is important to note that educators who decide to go outside their own school communities to get connected and who have a desire to continue to grow professionally do so for different reasons. Some do so because they feel isolated from their peers or perhaps they are the only third grade teacher in their building. Others do so because they feel as though their peers either cannot or do not want to grow in the same manner they do and therefore are seeking other means to improve their craft. It is also interesting to note that many educators who are connected are extremely well respected outside their own organizations, yet their own school districts may not see or appreciate the value that a connected educator can bring to the local organization. This, in turn, perpetuates a feeling of isolation and the need for these educators to become even more connected because they feel their drive for a higher standard is either not appreciated or is not fulfilled. In the end, we must ask the question: Who is helping you get better, or—more importantly— who is inspiring you to want to be great? The challenge facing schools today is the ability to cultivate a culture wherein all members of the school community feel comfortable in disrupting routines long established by the status quo and embrace a connected world which is ready to support their desire to learn without limits.

COMMUNICATING WITH PURPOSE

Today's educators have a vast library of free tools and resources available at their fingertips to tell not only their students' stories in the classroom, but also the stories of their schools. Tools such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, blogs, and podcasts are all available for free to support educators in getting connected in order to communicate their stories. Many connected schools today are utilizing Twitter in their classrooms/schools to tweet out daily messages, showcasing the passionate work of their students and staff. By creating district, school, and classroom Twitter accounts, educators can share the passion they have for their school communities. In doing so, you may want to consider creating more than one school Twitter account, depending on the size of your school and programs in order to streamline your communication. Possibilities include an account for the principal, student club/activities, athletics, fine arts, and even a parent/booster account. Additionally, we highly recommend creating a school hashtag to create a connected community where students, staff, parents, and the community can come together to connect and celebrate as one. Once you decide on a hashtag name, search this link: <http://www.hashtags.org/> (#hashtags.org, 2014); click in the search box to see if your selected hashtag has already been taken. Oftentimes, if the preferred name is already in use, there is a simple way to make

it your own by adding an additional character or two (if #LHS is already taken, for example, try #LHS2014). Once you have created a district, school, or group hashtag, start using these on all blog posts, tweets, and emails, and begin to encourage your students and families to do the same. Before you know it, a connected community emerges. Remember, the longer your hashtag, the fewer characters you have left from your original 280 characters, so it is important that your hashtag be as short and concise as possible.

One of the best examples of schools using hashtags effectively to create an engaged online learning community for their school originated with Jason Markey, Principal at East Leyden High School near Chicago, who worked with his school community to create the #leydenpride hashtag in order to bring a positive voice to his school community. Here is what Jason says about the power of the school's hashtag:

Two years ago, at the same time we went 1:1 as a school by giving all students a laptop, I was having a conversation with two of our students about Twitter. At the time, students and staff were getting frustrated at how Twitter was becoming an avenue for sharing negative or even inappropriate comments. We decided instead of just burying our head in the sand, we should encourage and build a culture of participation in a conversation and celebration of our schools online by creating our own school hashtag, which became #leydenpride. Over the last two years this hashtag has become the place where our students, staff, alumni, and even parents go to be part of our school's conversation online, creating a voice for everyone in our community to share our story.

(Markey, 2012)

To learn more about the Leyden journey, visit the link to Jason Markey's original blog post in 2012: Where is Your School's Online Conversation?

<http://jmarkeyap.blogspot.com/2012/11/where-is-your-schools-online.html>.

You can also visit the following link to a blog post by a #leydenpride student, Maja Bulka, who was a high school junior at the time she wrote this in February 2013: A Student's Perspective

<http://leydenlearn365.blogspot.com/2014/02/leydenpride-student-perspective.html> (Bulka, 2013).

For connected educators, information flows quickly and efficiently, making communication convenient for all stakeholders. Whether through a 280-character tweet, a blog post, a Facebook update, or an Instagram photo and caption, school staff members can highlight students for their academic achievements, music performances, athletic accomplishments, service projects, and capture them at the very moment they are happening. This cultivates a sense of pride among the student body and school community as students are recognized for positive deeds that otherwise may have gone unnoticed. Through such communications, parents are also quickly notified or given reminders about important school functions such as open house, conferences, concerts, schedule changes, school cancellations, and security concerns. They are even given links to important resources which can benefit them

or their children. In addition, when using Twitter to communicate news about school happenings, schools can link their school Twitter accounts and Facebook/Instagram pages so when a tweet is sent out it automatically embeds into the school's Facebook and/or Instagram pages. Social media tools such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are readily available for free and are easily accessible for connected educators everywhere to use as professional tools to assist them in *communicating* what they want, when they want, and how they want.

COLLABORATING WITH PASSION

In the opening pages of this book, we suggest that connected educators never lose sight of the fact that although connecting online in a variety of ways is an effective and efficient way of learning and growing professionally, nothing can compare with working and collaborating face to face with other educators. No amount of online connectivity can completely replace the power of meeting in person, but it can certainly play a vital role in building relationships with others around the world who share our sense of educational purpose and passion. Moreover, oftentimes what starts out as a virtual professional connection via Twitter, Facebook, Google Plus, or another online platform eventually becomes one in which PLN members meet face to face.

As an example, in February 2013, a group of connected educational leaders from all over the country who had originally “met” on Twitter decided to meet up in person at the National Association of Secondary School Principals’ (NASSP) annual conference in Washington, DC. One day, as they were having lunch and sharing the great things that were happening in their respective schools, the conversation shifted to a discussion about what they could do as leaders to support their teachers in getting more connected so they, too, could benefit from a similar experience these leaders were having. As they chatted, they developed the idea of planning a teacher exchange program identical to what currently happens in schools with student exchange programs. The idea included teachers connecting through social media, traveling to the “exchange” district, hosting the teacher in their home in return, and, finally, spending the day at their “partner” school observing classrooms and exchanging ideas with one another. Although those involved in planning the idea were enthusiastic about it at the time, it was never acted on—until things changed during the summer of 2013.

During that summer, another group of connected educators arranged to meet in person in Kansas City. Jimmy was present for this dinner, as was Robert Sigrist, an assistant principal at Central High School in St. Joseph, Missouri. Here is what Robert shared about that encounter, one which ultimately resulted in one of the first teacher exchanges originally planned over a year before:

Being connected via Twitter has given me the opportunity to interact with so many smart and talented educators. In the summer of 2013, a group of such educators met in Kansas City for an impromptu “BBQ Tweetup,” giving me the opportunity to meet many of these people face to face. During dinner, many of us were talking about the different issues facing us. I learned that Jimmy Casas’s school was a 1:1 learning environment, with

iPads as the device being used. This was something my school was also moving to and I shared with Jimmy that many of our teachers were worried because they were unsure how they were going to implement this technology in their classrooms. From our conversation at this dinner, Jimmy and I began to formulate a plan.

We were able to coordinate a “teacher exchange,” whereby I traveled with several staff members to Bettendorf, Iowa, on a Sunday night. We stayed with members of Jimmy’s staff in their own homes. We spent Monday at Bettendorf High School, where Jimmy serves as principal, seeing how they were able to incorporate this technology. Two weeks later, Jimmy and his teachers drove to St. Joseph, Missouri, on a Sunday night and we returned the favor, with several of our teachers hosting Bettendorf teachers in our homes and our school. Because of Twitter, not only were Jimmy and I able to connect with each other, but we were also able to expand that connection to teachers from our respective schools. Those staff members became key members of each other’s PLN and serve as ongoing resources for each other. While we could have connected them through Twitter only, having the face-to-face connection was powerful. I know our staff gained valuable information from Jimmy’s teachers, and I hope they were able to glean something from us as well. And it all started because of Twitter—and BBQ!

As connected educators, we should strive to support our colleagues in our own schools, districts, and beyond in the learning process through collaborative means. Sometimes this entails challenging others to step out of their comfort zone in hopes that they will reflect on their comfort zone in hopes that they will reflect on their own individual practices and experiences in order to learn and grow as educators. As we shared earlier and emphasize again in Chapter 4, being a connected educator is much more than just taking in: we must be willing to give back. One way to do this is by creating a personal blog. There are different platforms through which to create your own blog such as Blogger, WordPress, Tumblr, Posterous, and Habari, to name but a few. Before you decide which blogging platform to use, you want to keep these questions in mind to determine which might be best for you.

- Do I want to install, configure, and host my blog myself, or would I rather rely on a hosted service?
- Do I want to create my own blog theme, or am I satisfied with using or customizing an existing theme?
- Do I want to be able to install custom plug-ins or am I satisfied with the functionality that is built into the platform I choose?

- Will I be writing more long-form posts or posting cool things I find online? Or do I need to be able to do both?
- Do I want others to be able to comment on my post and interact with my content in a social way, or do I just want to be able to have a place to post my writing where people can read it and nobody can bother me?
- Am I willing to pay for this blogging platform?

(Dachis, 2012, para. 4)

If you are new to the world of blogging and thinking about starting a blog yourself, we recommend you begin by going through Google and using Blogger until you are confident that you are going to stick with it. Of course, you may choose to stick with this as your blogging platform permanently, but once you are comfortable with blogging and begin to get a better idea of your goals and your specific needs, you may want to explore the different features of competing platforms. Blogger will likely take care of most of your needs, and it is a free platform for blogging. Personal blogs can be formatted in many different ways, but you may want to consider including in your blog the following features:

- an “About Me” section
- a “Follow Me on Twitter” button
- a link to your Twitter feed
- a “Popular Posts” section
- a “Total Pageviews” button
- an option for readers to follow by email
- a link to your blog archive
- links to resources, articles, YouTube videos, and other information that may be of interest to your readers
- any awards you or your blog have received
- a “My Blog Lists” section

Connected educators all over the world are sharing their professional practices on their personal blogs and highlighting the tremendous work of their students and staff. They are handing out their “Top Lists” of best practices, tools, ideas, etc. so that others may learn by reflecting on their own practices. Others are showing their vulnerability by sharing publicly the mistakes they have made, fears they struggle to overcome, or the failures they have experienced. Finally, many take time to contribute personal stories or celebrate the successes of former students. As a way to get started, we encourage you to take time to visit the following blogs in order to connect with these incredible educators in various locations who support all educators on a daily basis by sharing their expertise and experiences through their blog posts. If you have yet to begin blogging yourself, we believe you will have a better idea of how to get started by reading these educational bloggers who have been at it for quite some time and who have inspired us with their writing and thinking:

Josh Stumpenhorst—<http://www.stumpteacher.blogspot.com/>

Justin Tarte—<http://www.justintarte.com/>

Tom Whitby—<http://tomwhitby.wordpress.com/>

David Culberhouse—<http://dculberh.wordpress.com/>

Ben Gilpin—<http://colorfulprincipal.blogspot.com/>

Richard Byrne—<http://www.freetech4teachers.com/>

Bill Ferriter—<http://blog.williamferriter.com/>

A.J. Juliani—<http://ajjuliani.com/>

In June 2013, Jimmy was looking through his Twitter stream when he noticed a tweet from Jason Markey, Principal at East Leyden High School, asking followers to read a blog post which had been written by one of his students. When Jimmy clicked on the link, he noticed the blog site had been created to challenge members of the Leyden school community to write a blog post for each day of the year. As Jimmy began to read the posts, he was moved by the stories that were being told by members (mostly students) of the school community. He began to wonder how he could take this idea and adapt it to his school in order to bring his team of 145 staff members closer together and cultivate a community where people could get a better understanding of the work they each did every day on behalf of all kids. The following month Jimmy met with the team leader of the school counseling department to discuss strategies for the upcoming school year to more deeply engage students in learning and school. As he listened to the counselor share her philosophy and her story about how she worked to connect with students, it struck him that her words could be the beginning of a blog post. In this way, the first blog post for what has become a venue for staff to share their expertise and stories, entitled “Breaking Down the Barriers,” was authored by school counselor Amy Harksen. After deciding on a name for the blog, TSLG1440 (which stands for “Teaching, Sharing, Learning, and Growing Every Minute of Every Day, 24/7, and refers to the fact that there are 1,440 minutes in each day), the school staff began regularly contributing posts to the blog, showcasing their teaching, sharing, learning, and growing that took place every minute of every day. Jimmy began by approaching staff members individually to see if they would be willing to share, in writing, their individual stories and talents. Staff members could write on any topic they chose with the only stipulation being they had to make a connection back to their classroom. Initially, staff members were hesitant to post. Reasons included not feeling comfortable with their own writing, being afraid to “put themselves out there,” not convinced they had anything important to share, and other reasons too many to mention. Interestingly, most teachers stated they lacked the confidence to write and felt the pressure of not presenting themselves in a positive light. However, once they actually finished writing and publishing a blog entry, every staff member who did so shared that they were glad they had written a post and had actually enjoyed their final draft once it was finished.

As the months passed, more and more readers began to follow the blog post. Staff were encouraged to participate through the principal’s weekly Monday Memo, where he highlighted the weekly author. Team leaders were also encouraged to model the way by participating in the blog challenge. Blog posts were tweeted out weekly and comments received via Twitter were shared with the authors. A link

was posted on the district website so members of the school community, including students, parents, community members, board members, and even prospective new families to the area could view the posts shared by members of the BHS staff. Staff members wrote with a sense of purpose and now anyone could get a glimpse into their thinking by reading about their personal stories and journeys. Creating a school blogging platform such as this one allows the school community to come together as collaborative colleagues. Teachers walking across campus will congratulate teachers in other departments on a job well done. Teachers will stop by the attendance office to tell the secretary how much they appreciated her work and her story. Paraeducators will receive words of encouragement when they share their stories and you can even invite retired teachers to jump into the mix to tell their stories. Even central office staff will likely make time to leave congratulatory comments on the blog.

The experience at Bettendorf High School with a “community” blog is but one of many examples and can easily be replicated at any school or in any school district. To take a look at how one school got started and how the movement grew, view the following link to the Bettendorf High School TSLG1440 blog, which can be found at <http://tslg1440.blogspot.com/>.

At the time of this writing, the blog included 38 postings written by 35 staff authors and has been accessed by over 20,000 readers from all over the world, including Australia, Japan, Canada, Algeria, Russia, Indonesia, Ukraine, India, China, France, Ireland, and Saudi Arabia. A community that had never before existed developed and grew through this collaborative blogging venture.

COMMUNITY-BUILDING WITH PRIDE

One common theme that we have found to be true about connected educators is they have a tremendous amount of pride when it comes to telling the story of their schools. They find ways to leverage technology and incorporate it into the school community in a seamless fashion. No longer do parents have to ask or wonder what their children are doing at school on a daily basis. They already know because connected educators are using social media tools such as Twitter, Instagram, Storify, YouTube, and other communication platforms to flatten the walls of the school so parents and the community can get a real and immediate glimpse of the countless and meaningful activities being experienced by students in schools every day. Whether you use pictures to show students working with their classmates and teachers on a project, or share a video demonstrating the pride students have in expressing their passion for learning, connected educators everywhere are making it a priority to highlight all that is awesome about their school communities.

Tony Sinanis (@TonySinanis), Principal at Cantiague Elementary School in Long Island, New York, is one such principal who has created his own YouTube videos using the TouchCast app (see www.touchcast.com) to build his school’s brand and bring his school community closer together. Here is what Tony says about the importance of building community by sharing your school’s story:

There are many ways to use videos to tell your story and build your brand! At Cantiague, we started doing Weekly Video Updates in which six or seven students from each class do research about what's happening on each grade level and then share those updates on camera. The children have two days to do their grade level research and then they join me for lunch and we make the video. The children are the best storytellers; who better to share what's happening in our schools than the people who are experiencing it first hand—our amazing kids! That is the power of student voice (#stuvoice). These video updates have taken the idea of a newsletter and thrown it forward into the 21st century, helping to flatten the walls of our school and give the community direct access into the learning and teaching occurring at Cantiague. These updates have also changed the conversations during various community events and activities because now families are talking about what their children are actually doing in school and they have a clear understanding of not only HOW we do things at Cantiague, but also WHY we do things at Cantiague. Our video updates have been a game changer!

For years, typical teachers and principals have lived professional lives marked by isolation, unconnected to any other educators outside their own school. They were limited in their communication, confined to a network of building colleagues, friends, family, community, and local media. This leaves schools at the mercy of others to tell their stories. This often leads to schools being viewed by many as challenging places where too much time and energy is spent on complaining about student behavior, lack of—or over-abundance of—parental involvement, shortage of resources, state and federal mandates, and so on. Sadly, what is lost in the translation is that others are not only listening, but they then, in turn, carry the same inaccurate and/or unfair messages and communicate these to others in the school community. Over time, these negative comments can become very damaging and begin to unfairly label a school as a poor-performing school with low morale, or worse yet, as cultivating a school culture that does not care about students. With the tools available to us now, it is easy to take the lead in ensuring that the story that gets told about our schools and our school districts is a story that is accurate and focused on the major, not the minor, happenings. How we share information can affect our school environments both positively and negatively. As the storytellers for our students and our schools, it is critical that we understand our role and intentionally plan how we communicate and share our story in a way that shows the pride we have in our school and our entire school community.

FOLLOW 5, FIND 5, TAKE 5

Follow 5: These five educators from our PLN stand as models in the area of the 3 Cs, which we have written about in this chapter. We have listed their names and Twitter “handles.” We encourage you to follow these exemplary educators on Twitter and interact with them to enhance your life as a connected educator. Here are short pieces of advice from these experts in the field on the importance of Embracing the 3 Cs: Communication, Collaboration, and Community:

1. *Curt Rees (@CurtRees)*. Elementary Principal, Wisconsin. Co-host of @TechlandiaCast. Curt participates regularly on #wischat, #cpchat, and #educoach. According to Rees,

Digital tools like social media services are excellent venues for building and enhancing positive culture within your school community. Countless successful activities are happening in schools every day, so make sure you take the time to share these events through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Pictures and videos of smiling kids and teachers working together in an engaging project say a lot about your school. Make it a priority to share all that is good and right in your school.

2. *Chris Kesler (@iamkesler)*. Eighth grade science teacher, Houston, Texas. Co-host of @eduallstarshq. Chris participates regularly on #tlap and #mschat. According to Kesler,

One of the most powerful things that I learned after getting connected with other educators outside of my school was the value of the 3 Cs. Once I embraced collaboration with my PLN, my world began to grow exponentially. I have been able to create projects that have made an impact on students and educators across the globe. Do not underestimate the power of connecting with others.

3. *Pernille Ripp (@pernilleripp)*. Seventh grade English teacher, Madison, Wisconsin. Pernille regularly participates on #titledtalk and #edchat. According to Ripp,

I didn't know I was unconnected, until I got connected. Then I realized the power of being a connected educator and what it meant for my students to be connected. Through our connections we have started global conversations, we have shared our messages, we have shared our hopes and dreams for the future. I created the “Global Read Aloud” so that others could find a way to become connected, and find their voice within the world. We are stronger, not just as educators, but as human beings when we reach beyond our classroom walls and invite the world in.

4. *Arin Kress (@ArinKress)*. Fifth grade teacher in Grove City, Ohio. Arin regularly participates in #5thchat. According to Kress,

Communicating, collaborating, and building community effectively with students and teachers within your school and beyond is an important skill for every teacher to have. I have used Skype in the classroom to connect my students with others from around the world, most notably a fifth grade class in Perth, Australia. We communicate daily via email, weekly via shared video, and quarterly via Skype calls and shared packages. We collaborate on math and science projects and have successfully built a global classroom community. If you are just beginning your journey as a connected educator, it is important to remember to start small but always be open to working with others online. You will likely learn from one another and their insights will hopefully benefit your students.

5. *Tom Whitford (@twhitford)*. Elementary Principal in Tomah, Wisconsin. Tom regularly follows #atplc, #wischat, #IAedchat, #satchat, and #sblchat. According to Whitford,

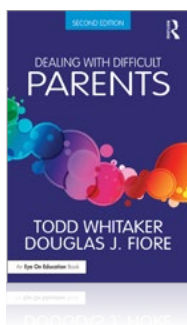
We are living a world that continues to flatten, becoming more transparent and connected. We need to ensure that we are sharing the great things happening in our schools with our stakeholders so our mission and vision become evident. We need to make sure that the great minds in our schools are connecting with other great educational minds across our nation and even our world. As the saying goes, “The smartest person in the room, is the room.” I have learned more from collaborating with great educators across the world than I ever have from a textbook or a lecture.

Find 5: We have found these five online resources/tools to be particularly useful in embracing the 3 Cs of Communication, Collaboration, and Community. The following links are resources that we have learned about via our PLN and that we have used ourselves to improve some aspect of our job performance or extend our thinking in this area:

1. 5 Effective Ways to Build Your School Tribe by @HollyClarkEdu <http://www.edudemic.com/school-tribe/>.
2. Check out these school/district hashtags on Twitter to understand the power of a community coming together to share their story. Simply type these hashtags into the search feature of Twitter or Tweetdeck and see what is being communicated via these school/district hashtags: #engage109, #bettpride, #leydenpride, and #gocrickets.
3. Leyden Learn 365 is a collection of daily posts about what is occurring at one school; for every day of the calendar year, you can click on the date to read about what students are learning—from students themselves! <http://leydenlearn365.blogspot.com/>.
4. How to Make a Blog on Blogger (tutorial): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qa6MQxJOqv4>.
5. Cantiague Elementary School YouTube videos: <https://www.youtube.com/user/Teechman1>.

Take 5: We conclude each chapter by recommending five action steps you can take to get started or continue as a connected educator. Here are five initial steps we suggest you take to get started with Embracing the 3 Cs: Communication, Collaboration, and Community:

1. Create a school Facebook page. Begin by posting three pictures a day that showcase all that is awesome about your school.
2. Open up a school Twitter account. Link your Twitter page to your Facebook page so that your tweets automatically embed on your Facebook page. Set a goal to share at least five tweets about what is happening in your school or district each day.
3. Create a school hashtag. With the help of students, staff, and parents, encourage all members of your school community to include the hashtag in all tweets highlighting students or the school.
4. Create your own blog. Using Blogger, create a blog site, write your first blog post, and then share it with your school community or with the entire world via Twitter or Facebook.
5. Create a video highlighting your students and school and then upload the video to YouTube. Send the link to your P2LN on Twitter.



The following is excerpted from *Dealing with Difficult Parents* by Todd Whitaker, Douglas J. Fiore.

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A tremendous number of teachers use social media as a communication tool. Teachers post pictures on Instagram, connect with friends via Facebook, and tweet their thoughts on a regular basis. However, often they may do this more as private citizens and not in their capacity as teachers. In fact, some schools still even have very definite policies regarding whether or not teachers can use social media tools in their roles as school employees. However, if allowed, we urge you to use social media in your role as a teacher to communicate positively, widely, and effectively with parents. Used appropriately, social media is an incredible tool for communicating with lots of parents in a simple format. It needs to be done carefully, but many, many teachers are able to do so effectively, and they find that social media is a fantastic and useful communication method.

While once reserved for the cutting edge, high tech among us, it has become almost necessary for teachers to utilize social media as a communication tool with parents. Traditionally, all school communications, particularly those involving parents, have been all about managing the flow of information and then framing the discussion about that information. It has been done via school newsletters, emails, postcards, and the like. But in today's world, where we're enriched with so much media and technology, things have changed. Popular social media tools like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Vine, blogs, and webinars enable schools to maintain interactive dialogue with parents, students, and community members. Today, the purpose of communicating with parents is not just about information sharing. Instead, it is all about building relationships. The interactive nature of these tools is actually all simplest, most practical way to build relationships with large groups of people.

It can also be the simplest and best tool available for sharing good news with parents and the larger community. As Whitaker, Zoul, and Casas say in *What Connected Educators Do Differently* (2015), we need to take advantage of this tool so we can ensure the right information gets shared about our school. They explain:

With the tools available to us now, it is easy to take the lead in ensuring that the story that gets told about our schools and our school districts is a story that is accurate and focused on the major, not the minor, happenings. How we share information can affect our school environments both positively and negatively. As the storytellers for our students and our schools, it is critical that we understand our role and intentionally plan how we communicate and share our story in a way that shows the pride we have in our school and our entire school community. (p. 40)

IS EVERYBODY DOING IT?

If you need to be convinced about the widespread use of social media in our society today, consider these points. More videos are uploaded to YouTube in 60 days than the combined number that NBC, ABC, and CBS have produced in 60 years. How many readers know that the U.S. Library of Congress has archived every tweet ever sent via Twitter? At press, that represents more than 200 billion messages. When this book went to press, the top five social media sites had more than 2 billion followers. Increasingly and rapidly, most people have ditched their simple cell phones and begun

using smartphones. In 2014, more than two-thirds of Americans used smartphones. Smartphone users check Facebook, a tool that was once thought to be a passing fad, an average of 14 times a day. Within 10 minutes of waking up, 81 percent of smartphone users check social media (statistics from www.iacpsocialmedia.org). We admit that we are among those with this lifestyle habit. In short, social media is pervasive.

In the time it takes you to read this book, at least five more teachers will open or begin using Twitter accounts. Twitter, in short, is the fastest growing social media outlet for getting information out to large groups of followers. While it's easiest to measure the impact of Twitter by looking at the number of people using it, it's more significant and useful to examine how much more sophisticated its use has become. Just a short while ago, people logged on to Twitter so they could follow celebrities and read their humorous comments. Soon after, though, great teachers began using Twitter to grow their professional and personal networks and to put out information for others to view at their convenience. Twitter, in short, has become an incredible communication tool that costs nothing but impacts an endless number of people. Back when we were classroom teachers, there simply was nothing, real or even imagined, that could do this.

In addition to being such a useful tool, Twitter is one of the easiest social media tools to master. Essentially, these are only a few main things to consider:

1. Whatever you want to say needs to be said in 280 characters or less.
2. Pictures can easily be attached to tweets. Once attached, they all appear in the same format
3. Hashtags (#) are used to provide links to other tweets containing the word or words listed immediately after the hashtag.

So, if you are not already using Twitter to communicate and broadcast messages to parents and/or other community stakeholders, you really should consider beginning.

A TWITTER CLASSROOM

No matter your grade level or discipline, just think of the valuable communication tool Twitter can be in your classroom. As you read this book, there are teachers across the country that are tweeting at the end of the school day short messages that parents can view pertaining to homework assignments, enriched learning opportunities, or important reminders. Taken further, there are teachers sending out tweets during their lunch hour that celebrate individual class accomplishments or that simply contain positive messages about school. Just imagine parents' reaction when they read tweets like those below:

- Today, my students really brought their A game.
- So proud of my students!
- Teaching is the greatest job in the world!
- We love learning about Columbus! pic.twitter.com/####
- Every student turned in their homework today!

Teachers also can appoint students to be the official class tweeter. Using the account set up for the teacher or for the class, the selected student could post the pictures or write the tweets. In this way, Twitter becomes a common tool shared by all members of the class community. Don't forget that parents are even more likely to follow a teacher or a class on Twitter if they know that their child may be the one writing the tweets or taking the pictures to attach. The quickest way to grow your local teacher network in your community is to include students in your tweets.

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

As you think about the best ways to use social media tools with parents, make sure that you consider what the purpose is of these tools in the first place. Most times, social media works best when the teacher has actually thought about her purpose for using it. Here are some things you need to consider before jumping in:

- What is the current state of affairs in terms of your relationship with parents? What are parents and community members already saying about your school?
- What steps do you need to take to build trust and a sense of community? How can you leverage what people are already saying to help develop a sense of community?
- Once you've built trust and community, it's easy to ask parents to support fundraisers, volunteer for school activities, or become members of your school-parent group.
- With a few strong parent relationships, you can get commitments from your inner circle of parent leaders to comment and share school messages on Facebook and Twitter.
- Add Facebook and Twitter links to all emails and handouts from the school and parent group to facilitate wider participation.
- Create a *social media plan* for big events like the school carnival, fundraisers, academic fairs, family cleanup days, and membership drives. What messages do you want your parent community to share? What actions do you want them to take? Write suggested Facebook posts and Twitter messages and share them with your inner circle of parent social media leaders.
- Add a Facebook "like" box and a "follow us on Twitter" button to your school or classroom website.

The main reason for doing this in the first place is to help build a very broad community of parents, teachers, and volunteers who are engaged and willing to become involved and support your school. Once parents start joining your online community (on Facebook and Twitter, for example), listen and engage with them. Build rapport and trust so they stick around, invite their friends, and take positive actions for your school! Remember, if parents don't typically, or ever, use the social media tool that you use, they quickly will once they realize that the tweets may feature their own kids. Nothing recruits people to Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram more quickly, for example, than the thought that they might be featured in some way!

REMEMBER TO USE GOOD JUDGMENT

There are cautionary tales about social media, but they typically involve teachers who failed to use good judgment. The cautionary tales involve teachers who have improperly used these social media outlets and/or violated school policies. In each case described below, the situation was entirely avoidable. While we don't want to dwell on the negative, consider these examples:

In 2015, a Florida parent discovered a Facebook discussion among teachers of her child's elementary school in which one teacher called a student the "evolutionary link between orangutans and humans." Another teacher responded that the comment made her "laugh out loud."

In 2014, a first grade teacher in New Jersey was suspended after writing on Facebook that she felt like a "warden," and referred to students as "future criminals."

Also in 2014, a Pennsylvania teacher was suspended for blogging about her students and referring to them as "disengaged, lazy whiners."

While we need to be aware of the consequences of negative usage, we needn't fear those consequences. Great teachers use great judgment all the time, every day. The examples on page 46 simply are not examples of good judgment at all.

The only other consideration to be mindful of is that privacy settings on social media tools are not entirely foolproof. People often fail to remember how easy it is for unintended people to read their social media posts. Some people become nervous by this fact, but again, we say that using good judgment about what to post negates this concern. Even though you intend your social media communication with parents to remain within your defined community group, it doesn't matter if other people see it, as long as you use good judgment. Those among you who use social media as a communication tool with parents already know that there is nothing to fear, but a great deal to gain. Those of you who don't should consider trying it. It takes little time and produces great rewards!

A FEW PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

While there are many great uses of different social media tools for teachers to communicate with parents, we'll close this chapter with a few practical uses for Pinterest, Twitter, and Facebook, as these are the most widely used and easily accessible via smartphone:

PINTEREST

As a visual social media tool, Pinterest is all about the pictures. Users "pin" pictures to their "boards," so that other users with similar interests can see them and learn from them. It essentially is a thought and idea gathering place.

Teachers can pin pictures of their students engaged in a classroom activity or a field trip. They can post pictures taken from their Smart Boards so that students and parents can review lessons at home. They can post pictures of informational notes that previously were only communicated through copy paper and ink. Basically, if you can see it, you can pin it!

TWITTER

Since tweets are limited to 280 characters, Twitter is a great tool for posting short, specific comments or directions. Also, remember that it is possible to set up your Twitter account so that only approved followers can view your tweets. However, you still should write them in a manner that you wouldn't mind the whole world seeing. Twitter can very easily and effectively be used to:

1. Share educational news and events that happened during the day;
2. Post reminders about upcoming events or alterations in the school schedule;
3. Share information from field trips or school activities.

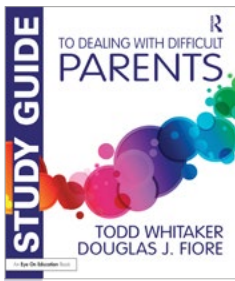
Teachers can use Twitter in a private manner by tweeting directly to a parent of a nervous child to let that parent know how the child is doing during the day. In the old days, this required time to make a telephone call and hope that the parent was available to answer. With children who are on a behavior plan, building Twitter into the plan can let the child know that the parent and teacher are on the same page and in regular communication.

FACEBOOK

Since so many people are on Facebook, you can use it to post information for a wide group of parents to see instantly. Facebook allows you to post updates that parents can see immediately when they log onto their page. You can post information about homework, to clarify a new policy, or to explain how students are to complete an assignment. Parents can also send you a private message to ask questions about homework or to ask for a meeting. Parents who might be uncomfortable asking questions in person might feel far more at ease when using Facebook.

Not only does Facebook give you an easy way to share class news and information with parents, but it also has some privacy settings that are easy to use. For example, you can create a private parents' group for your class and share information only with the parents of your students. By using the privacy settings, outside users should not have access to this information. Since you always use sound judgment however, that's not really a concern. Whatever you post on your class Facebook page will only pertain to the people that you are "friends" with, but if others see it, you have no concerns.

Parents are busier than ever, and their lives are far more complex than they used to be. Traditional methods of communicating with them lose their effectiveness more and more each day. We still really value positive telephone calls, emails, or postcards. In fact, great teachers increase, not decrease, their use of these communication tools. The world of social media has opened up so many doors that are easy to navigate, though. As most readers already know because of their personal use of these tools, we all can communicate with, inform, and stay in touch with people in ways that were unimaginable just a short while ago. We urge you to bring these tools into your professional life as a teacher. Parents will appreciate it, and the perception of you, as a teacher who regularly and purposefully communicates, will grow by leaps and bounds.



The following is excerpted from *Study Guide to Dealing with Difficult Parents* by Todd Whitaker, Douglas J. Fiore.

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KEY CONCEPTS

- Used appropriately, social media is an incredible tool for communicating with lots of parents in a simple format.
- Smartphone users check Facebook, a tool that was once thought to be a passing fad, an average of 14 times a day. In addition, 81 percent of smartphone users check social media within 10 minutes of waking up.
- There are teachers across the country who are tweeting at the end of the school day short messages that parents can view pertaining to homework assignments, enriched learning opportunities, or important reminders.
- If parents don't typically, or ever, use the social media tool that you use, they quickly will once they realize that the tweets may feature their own kids and their accomplishments.
- Teachers can use Pinterest to pin pictures of their students engaged in a classroom activity or a field trip. They can post pictures taken from their smart boards so that students and parents can review lessons at home. They can post pictures of informational notes that previously were only communicated through copy paper and ink.
- Facebook allows you to post updates that parents can see immediately when they log onto their page. You can post information that pertains to homework, to clarify a new policy, or to explain how students are to complete an assignment. Parents can also send you a private message to ask questions about homework or to ask for a meeting.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which social media tools do you already use with parents? Are there tools that you can use effectively with information gleaned from this chapter?
2. What are some considerations in using Twitter as a communication tool with parents?
3. What are some things to consider before embarking on a meaningful social media campaign with parents?
4. How can you get parents to engage with you via social media?
5. What are five specific things that you can do with the various social media tools at your disposal to communicate effectively with parents?

NOTES

JOURNAL PROMPT

Make a list of all social media tools that you currently use in your personal life. For each one of the tools on your list, reflect on which ones you believe you could use as a communication tool with parents. What are some things to consider before using these tools? Do you know teachers whom you could consult in using these tools effectively? Write a plan for more effectively using varied social media tools to communicate with parents.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE!

In this chapter, the authors give some examples of ways in which social media can be incorporated into a communication plan for parents. Distribute five slips of paper to each member in your study group. Ask each member to list an outcome on each slip that can be expected when the use of social media with parents is expanded upon. Collect the slips and categorize each of them as positive or negative. Distribute the collaborative lists of positive and negative outcomes to each member of the study group. For each negative outcome, discuss how they can be eliminated. You should be left with only a list of positive outcomes of using social media in your communication plan. Distribute this positive list to all members of the study team.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Have participants read the bulleted list in the section called "Initial Considerations." In small groups, ask them to rank the list in order of importance for effectively utilizing social media tools for communicating with parents. Volunteers can then add considerations to this list not presented by the authors.

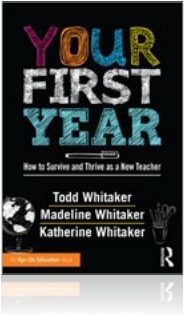
APPLICATION

Complete the survey below as a way to self-reflect on your individual use of social media. Respond to each statement with the following one to four ranking.

SOCIAL MEDIA PRACTICES SELF-ASSESSMENT

4 = Almost always; 3 = Frequently; 2 = Occasionally; 1 = Never

- ___ 1. I use social media tools in my personal life.
- ___ 2. I use social media as a tool to communicate with parents.
- ___ 3. I pay close attention to the security settings of social media tools that I use.
- ___ 4. I involve students in my use of social media as a parent communication tool.
- ___ 5. I use social media daily.
- ___ 6. I communicate with parents daily.
- ___ 7. I vary the methods that I use to communicate with parents.



The following is excerpted from *Your First Year: How to Survive and Thrive as a New Teacher* by Todd Whitaker, Madeline Whitaker, and Katherine Whitaker.

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Purchase a copy [HERE](#).

This Study Guide is designed to help your new teachers put the ideas from *Your First Year* into practice in their own classroom. You can print this guide and share with your teachers; they can work on it independently, with a mentor or colleague, or with a group. Thank you to you and your teachers for choosing to make a difference, and good luck!

SECTION I:

BEFORE THE STUDENTS ARRIVE: STRUCTURE, STRUCTURE, STRUCTURE

CHAPTER 1: SETTING UP AND ORGANIZING YOUR CLASSROOM (PP. 3-6)

1. What grade level will you be teaching, and how many students will be in your class? Sketch out a potential classroom arrangement that would allow you to be successful. For example, would you want desks to be clustered in groups or in a circle? Would you want to have a pillow area?

2. Make a list of the supplies your students will need to have every day to be successful in your class. Then write an S next to items that will be provided by the school, and an H next to items they will be expected to bring in from home. How will you be prepared when students show up with missing items?

- | | | |
|----|----|----|
| a. | e. | i. |
| b. | f. | j. |
| c. | g. | k. |
| d. | h. | l. |

CHAPTER 2: DEVELOPING YOUR PROCEDURES (PP. 7-10)

3. Using the guidelines on pages 8 and 9, draft your classroom procedures on separate paper. Your procedures should cover everything from using supplies, to turning in homework, to using the bathroom, etc. Remember that you can change these in-flight if needed, but it's important to have them planned before day 1.

If you get stuck, see which ones might already be listed in your school handbook, or ask a mentor or colleague for advice. You could also try asking the Twitterverse with hashtag #NTchat (new teacher chat). For example, you could ask for suggestions on bathroom policies for middle schoolers.

4. Now go back to the procedures you drafted and run them by your mentor or a trusted colleague. Make revisions if needed.

CHAPTER 3: DEVELOPING YOUR RULES (PP. 11-15)

5. Draft some rules for your classroom on separate paper.

6. Now filter your rules using these reflection questions from page 14 of the book: Do you feel comfortable consistently enforcing the rules you have chosen? Do you need to make varied rules for different classes that you teach? Did you choose rules that you think your students will also be able to take ownership of?

CHAPTER 4: CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT: PREPARE YOUR MINDSET (PP. 16-24)

7. Look at the list on page 18 for building relationships with students. Which three of those sound like ones you'll definitely want to or be able to try? Can you think of any others?

1.

2.

3.

Others:

8. Reflect on the house metaphor from this chapter. Why are relationships the foundation of the house? Why are high and specific expectations necessary to build the house? And finally, how can lack of consistency harm the house's structure?

CHAPTER 5: WHEN STUDENTS FOLLOW THE RULES... OR DON'T (PP. 25-32)

9. Brainstorm a consequences system that might work for you. (Refer to the examples on pages 30-31 for help—tally system, recording points on a tablet, etc.)

CHAPTER 6: LESSON PLANNING AND INSTRUCTION (PP. 33-43)

10. Does your school have a required lesson plan format? If not, think of the format that will work for you (perhaps one you were given in grad school or one you found online and modified). How can you make sure you have enough planned in a lesson to avoid downtime?

11. How can you make lessons so engaging that they naturally prevent misbehavior? Brainstorm some of your favorite methods for making learning more active for students.

SECTION II: THE STUDENTS ARE HERE... NOW WHAT?

CHAPTER 7: EXPLAINING AND PRACTICING PROCEDURES (PP. 47-52)

12. What steps do the authors give for implementing structures in your classroom? Why are practice and modeling so important?

CHAPTER 8: MANAGING YOUR CLASSROOM (PP. 53-69)

13. Reflect on the teachers you had growing up. Did any of them tell you about their bad moods and act like the students themselves? How can managing yourself and staying upbeat improve the dynamic of your classroom?

14. Think about the subtle steering and proximity techniques offered in this chapter. How are they more effective than calling out the misbehavior? Try it the next time a student misbehaves in your class, and write your thoughts on how it went here:

15. Hopefully you won't encounter "what if" situations, but if you do, make sure you know your school's protocol. For example, what is your school's policy on gun violence? Write it here. It's always important to know the protocols, but we hope you won't ever need to implement them.

16. The next section is on repairing and rebuilding. Why is it important to repair when in doubt? Reflect below.

SECTION III: WORKING WITH ADULTS

CHAPTER 9: WORKING WITH ADMINISTRATORS (PP. 73-76)

17. Is your principal proactive about meeting with teachers? If not, how can you proactively take the opportunity to interact with him or her? Brainstorm some ideas here:

CHAPTER 10: WORKING WITH PEERS (PP. 77-79)

18. Do you have a positive mentor with whom you like working? If not, what positive colleagues can you seek out for help?

CHAPTER 11: THE EMPOWERERS (PP. 80-84)

19. Find an empowerer in your school or even in the Twitterverse and reach out to him or her. Write how it goes here. How can you continue a relationship with this person to motivate you and help you improve?

CHAPTER 12: DON'T BE AFRAID TO REPAIR: STUDENTS, CO-WORKERS, PRINCIPAL (PP. 85-88)

20. Some people worry that apologizing to students will make them seem weak or give students the upper hand, but why do the authors say it is so important to apologize and not be afraid to repair?

CHAPTER 13: PARENTS: FRIEND NOT FOE (PP. 89-94)

21. List one way you can build relationships with parents early in the year, besides back to school night. Then give it a try!

22. How can you fit positive phone calls into your busy week? Try one and reflect on how it goes here:

SECTION IV:

CONTINUING TO REFLECT, REFINE, AND GROW ON YOUR JOURNEY

CHAPTER 14: MIDFLIGHT CORRECTIONS (PP. 97-105)

23. As the authors say, good teachers reflect each day on how their lessons went—on where we stood, the tone of our voice, whether our instructions and explanations were clear, etc. Why is this so important? What method will you use for reflecting this year (quiet time, journaling, blogging, etc.)?

24. What is the difference between tweaking and resetting?

25. How will you know if it's time to hit the reset button?

CHAPTER 15: BE A SPONGE (PP. 106-110)

26. How often will you be observed this year? What other opportunities will you be given to improve your practice this year? What other opportunities can you find yourself?

CHAPTER 16: IT ALWAYS STARTS WITH YOU (PP. 111-113)

27. Is there anything bothering you about your teaching situation this year that doesn't seem to be in your control? What can you do about it anyway?

CHAPTER 17: WHAT'S NEXT? (PP. 114-116)

28. As you move forward on your journey, you'll have good days and bad. Remind yourself why you chose to become a teacher and write it here. Refer back to it when you need motivation to get through a tough day.

Remember, you have chosen the most special profession. Thank you for choosing to matter and choosing to make a difference!