American English LIVE!

Connecting to Learn: Growing Professionally through Teacher-to-Teacher Engagement

March 25th @ 8 am or 1 pm EDT

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Connecting to Learn: Growing Professionally through Teacher-to-Teacher Engagement

Think about the best teaching strategies you have ever learned. Did you learn them from another teacher?

Connecting and conversing with peers can offer teachers great opportunities for professional growth.

This session will:
• explore how to expand our professional networks and build community, both inside and outside of our schools and institutions
• share ways to foster inspiring conversations with colleagues during such activities as reading discussions and lesson shares
• examine ways of making the most of faculty meetings and professional conferences
Dr. Christopher Stillwell has taught English as a Second or Foreign Language in Spain, Japan, and the US, and he has worked as a teacher educator in such places as Egypt, Peru, and Laos.

He has edited two books for the TESOL International Association on language teaching insights from other fields.

Currently, he is an instructor and advisory board member for University of California Irvine’s online TESOL certificate program, and he is a professor of ESL at College of the Sequoias.
Connecting to Learn
Growing Professionally through Teacher-to-Teacher Engagement

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Thank You
Overview

• Teacher-to-Teacher Engagement: What Is It?
• Connecting with Other Teachers
  • Why?
  • How?
• How to Learn from Other Teachers
• Practical Applications
What is teacher-to-teacher engagement and connection?

• Teachers
  • getting to know one another
  • sharing ideas, resources, and information
  • providing support
  • exploring a topic

• Could be:
  • structured
  • unstructured
  • face-to-face
  • online
  • synchronous
  • asynchronous
Connecting with Other Teachers: Why?
Why is it important to connect with other teachers?
• professional growth
• access to opportunities
• learning through interaction
• relationships bring happiness
• provides ways to help others
• fights burnout
Connecting with Other Teachers: How?
How to Connect with Other Teachers

• Get teachers together

• Cultivate your teacher network
Get Teachers Together

• Specify the goal and activity

• Distribute responsibility

• Be a leader

• Remove obstacles
Specify a Goal

- Connect and learn
  - Strengthen collaboration with fellow teachers

- Make specific improvements
  - to your curriculum
  - to your teaching methodology
  - to your school
Find a Matching Activity

- AE Live viewing party
- Lunch and learn
- Group problem solving
- Reading discussion group
- Peer observation
- Lesson study
Distribute Responsibility

• Share responsibility for planning

• Distribute topic selection/discussion leadership

• Benefits:
  • More sustainable
  • More ownership
Be a Leader

• Find a place to meet (in person or online)

• Set the schedule

• Establish a routine

• Seek administrative support (e.g., time off for meetings, funding for food and resources)
Remove Obstacles

Time

Hunger

Disconnect
Obstacle: Time

• Teachers are extremely busy.
• If a meeting requires a lot of preparation, teachers may not be able to participate.
• Consider ways teachers can learn together without a great deal of preparation.
• **Key: Keep it simple.**
• Join an online discussion before the event
• Look at the suggested readings
• Organize an in-person or virtual viewing group party
• Organize a discussion after the session, using the discussion questions provided at the end of the session
Obstacle: Hunger

- Stomachs or minds?
- Snacks
- Sharing
Lunch and Learn

• Breaking bread together helps people build connection
• As they eat together, teachers can discuss a particular topic
• The topic can be simple, with minimal preparation
  • favorite lesson ideas
  • things learned at a recent conference or teacher meeting
  • a short article
Teaching is said to be an egg carton profession.

Teachers tend to be isolated from one another as they work in their separate classrooms.

Teachers may also feel uncomfortable discussing their teaching practices and participating in activities with colleagues.
Build Community

- Include everyone
- Use icebreaker activities to help everyone learn about one another
- Celebrate what makes the group valuable
- Foster feelings of safety and acceptance
Cultivating Your Network
What actions might you take to build your network?
Cultivate Your Network

- Be Interested in People
- Appreciate your Existing Network

Appreciate your Existing Network
“You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.”

– Dale Carnegie
Be Interested in People

- Learn
- Help
- Be a fan
Appreciate your Existing Network Within and Beyond the Carton

- Co-workers
- Fellow students
- Former teachers
How to Learn From Other Teachers
How do you learn from other teachers?
How to Learn From Other Teachers

• Collaborate

• Discuss inclusively

• Visit a classroom

• Seize opportunities
Collaborate

• All shared projects are learning opportunities

• Formal collaborative learning activities such as group projects and jigsaw activities can be especially effective
Use Inclusive Discussion Practices

- Don’t call on the first volunteer
- Get multiple answers
- Avoid closure
- Use think/write-pair-share
Visit a Classroom
How do you feel about being observed?
“Seeing you allows me to see myself differently and to explore variables we both use.”

(Fanselow, 1998)
Seize Opportunities

• Be where people are
• Arrive early, stay late
• Be active
Practical Applications
Examples of Connecting to Learn

• Group problem-solving
• Jigsaw activities
• Lesson Study
Group Problem-Solving

Step 1: Pose open question
What are common challenges in the classroom?

Step 2: Brainstorm ideas
• Lack of time
✓ • Assessment in large classes
✓ • Engagement in multi-level classes
• Classroom management

Step 3: Vote on (2) most interesting challenges
Group Problem-Solving

**Step 4:** Divide into teams. Each team discusses solutions/actions for one problem

**Step 5:** Teams share their ideas with the group

**Step 6:** Discuss and consider future actions
Jigsaw Activities

Pick (4) simple readings on associated topics, or pick one reading that has (4) distinct parts.
Distribute the readings evenly so that each participant is responsible for reading only one of the four texts.
People who have read the same text sit together to **identify key points** and agree on how to **summarize it**
Mix into new groups where **each member leads discussion** of a different text
Lesson Study

**Step 1:** A team of teachers develops a lesson that is useful for all of their classes

**Step 2:** One teacher uses the lesson in class while being observed by the other teachers

**Step 3:** The teachers discuss the lesson and make refinements

Repeat steps 2 and 3 until the group is satisfied with the lesson
Summing Up
Get Teachers Together

• Specify the goal and activity
• Distribute responsibility
• Be a leader

Remove Obstacles

Time
Hunger
Disconnect

Cultivate Your Network

Be Interested in People
Appreciate your Existing Network

Learn From Other Teachers

• Collaborate
• Discuss inclusively
• Visit a classroom
• Seize opportunities
Spread Happiness
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References


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Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. It is important to connect and learn from teachers within a professional network. How might you take the concepts learned today and apply them to cultivating your own professional network?

2. What aspects of being part of an active professional network do you find most beneficial? What aspects do you find challenging?

3. What advice would you give to a new member of your professional network?