

From Connected Learning to Connected Teaching: Editor's Introduction

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A model of connected teaching is needed to complement the model of connected learning. This special issue of *Contemporary Issues in English Language Arts Teacher Education* shares some innovative strategies teacher educators are using to prepare teachers to become connected educators. Each of the articles in this issue engages with the connected learning perspective of technology and education by focusing on an expansive ecology of learning and positioning tools as valuable insofar as they contribute to that ecology.

Much of the current rhetoric about technology and education relates to devices and software programs: what types schools should purchase, how much money districts should spend on them, how they should be integrated into classroom learning, and what return on investment they should produce. The implicit message communicated by this rhetoric is that technology transforms education through the medium of specific tools – that these tools are what structure and produce powerful teaching and learning. Give teachers and students laptops and Google Classroom accounts, and magic will ensue.

Over the past several years, a group of learning scientists – led by Mimi Ito at the University of California, Irvine – has pushed back against this perspective, arguing that technology has the potential to transform education, not because of the affordances of any particular tool but because it creates a new ecology of learning that fosters collaboration, communication, and creativity. In a landmark 2013 report, this group detailed an educational approach called connected learning that aims to leverage this ecology to advance academic achievement, equity, and civic engagement.

Connected learning encourages educators to consider how technological advancements allow us to interact in new ways and then develop learning opportunities that take advantage of these new forms of interaction. In this model, learning is of primary importance – not the tools. According to the connected learning framework, technology supports the development of open networks through which individuals who share interests can achieve a common purpose by creating together. As such, it suggests that teaching and learning should be designed to support these competencies. While this view of teaching and learning predates the digital revolution of the 21st century, connected learning offers a vocabulary and approach for harnessing technology in meaningful and relevant ways.

Scholars and practitioners have been hard at work in the years since the report was released to illuminate what connected learning looks like in practice with young people in both formal and informal learning contexts; indeed, the annotated bibliography in this issue offers an exhaustive inventory of research to date. As an English language arts (ELA) teacher educator, I pored over this research and became increasingly excited about how connected learning could benefit young people.

I also found a bit of a gap, however. While these pieces often went into great detail about how young people responded to the innovative learning opportunities designed by the educators in their lives, they did not usually delve deeply into how these educators developed the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that helped them design these opportunities in the first place. Instead of magical devices, I seemed to be encountering magical teachers who had somehow internalized this orientation toward learning and knew exactly how to embody it.

That is when I realized that we need a model of connected teaching to complement the model of connected learning. I suggested the core tenets of a such a model in a recent blog post (2017) for the Digital Media and Learning Hub that I developed by examining the work of teachers affiliated with the National Writing Project who were committed to connected learning. I also wanted to collect and disseminate more burgeoning scholarship about the ways that teachers were being introduced to and experiencing connected learning themselves – particularly within the discipline of ELA, which is dedicated to the exploration of literacy in all of its modalities. Thus, this special issue was born to share the innovative strategies teacher educators are using to prepare teachers to become connected educators.

Each of the articles in this issue engages with the connected learning perspective of technology and education by focusing on an expansive ecology of learning and positioning tools as valuable insofar as they contribute to that ecology. For instance, [Bettina Hsieh's piece](#) focuses on Twitter but goes beyond considering it as simply a tool that teachers can use in the classroom with students, instead exploring how the platform can serve as an organic source of resources and community among ELA educators.

Two of the articles explore how a connected learning approach to technology can contribute to the transformation of the traditional field experience component of preservice teacher education programs. [Clarice Moran](#) as well as [Julie Rust and Devon Cantwell](#) analyzed how digital media sites can serve as third spaces in which both educators and young people disrupt hierarchical teacher-student relationships and renegotiate their roles as Freirian coteachers and colearners by collaborating on multimodal literacy projects.

[Kira Baker-Doyle](#) shares the personal journey of a literacy teacher educator learning to code in order to detail the intersections of ELA education and computer programming and suggests how a combined analysis of the two can foster new understandings of critical literacy and civic engagement. [Stephanie West-Puckett, Anna Smith, Christina Cantrill, and Mia Zamora](#) analyzed the ways a massive online open course (MOOC) dedicated to encouraging teachers to learn about and experiment with connected learning raises questions about the sufficiency of open networks as a support for participatory learning. They push us to think beyond the concept of “open” and consider what it means to truly design for connection.

Finally, [Sarah Lohnes Watulak, Rebecca Woodard, Anna Smith, Lindy Johnson, Nathan Phillips, and Katalin Wargo](#) contribute to an understanding of where the field of connected learning started, where it is now, and where it will continue to go through a living and interactive annotated bibliography that is open to editing by the ELA community. They

organized the wealth of information into themes relevant to ELA teacher educators and provided an intuitive and creative way to search and contribute to the ongoing conversation about connected learning and teaching.

This issue seeks to spark further dialogue about the purposes of teaching and learning in a digitally interconnected society and ways to ensure that educators are harnessing the affordances of technology for the purposes of equity, connection, and justice, instead of allowing ourselves to be harnessed by shiny devices that promise innovation but leave us mired in the pedagogical status quo.

References

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