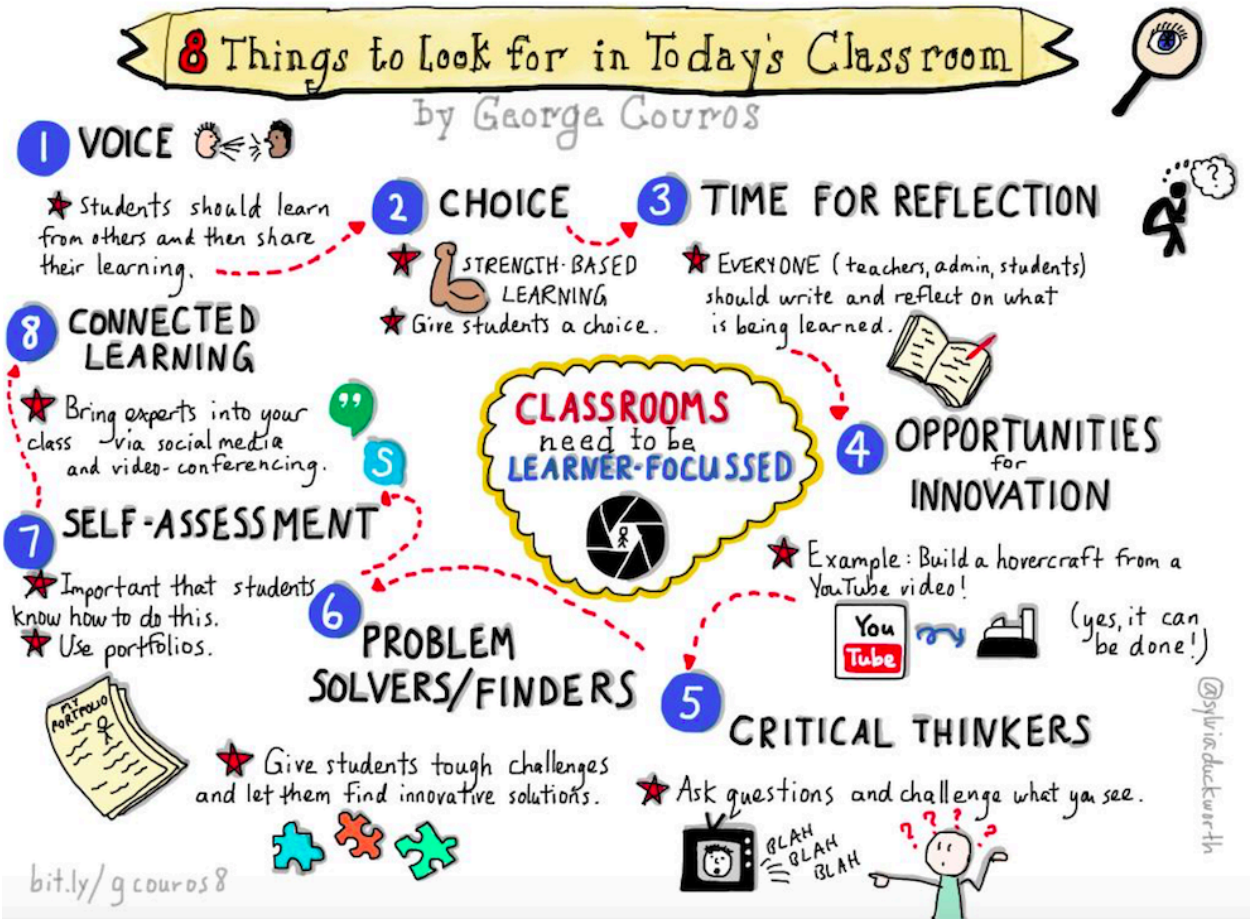


Over two years ago, I wrote "8 Things To Look for in Today's Classroom", and more recently, Sylvia Duckworth created the above visual that has been shared numerous times. As I am in the process of going deeper into the topic, someone asked me if this is something that we could do in professional development. As someone who is a big believer in creating experiences for educators where they partake in the types of learning that should happen in the classroom, I thought this suggestion made total sense.

To be honest with you, professional learning in many cases needs an overhaul. **If the best thing that professional learning has to offer is lunch, we are in trouble.** But how many educators are *really* excited about the types of professional learning opportunities that are offered in their school? Like, "wake-up-in-the-morning-and-can't-wait-to-get-to-work" excited? What is promising though, is that many schools are moving away from the traditional types of professional learning that weren't working for staff, and trying some new ideas.

Below, I am going to offer some of my own thoughts, not solutions, to different ways that professional learning can happen in schools and districts. This is more "thinking openly" for myself than anything, but I wanted to try to go deeper into this process.

So where I thought I would start is taking each one of the elements shared in the "8 Things", and try to share an idea that focuses on one of the elements specifically, but obviously, each idea can have multiple elements.

Here is each element with the corresponding letters to identify them in each activity.

Voice (V), Choice (C) , Connected Learning (CL), Problem-Finders/Solvers (PFS), Reflection (R) , Self-Assessment (SA), Critical Thinking (CT), Opportunities for Innovation (INNO)

Below is each element, with the rationale on why it is important, and then one or two ideas, that could be large or small, and not necessarily delivered on a typical professional development day

Voice

Rationale: Sharing ideas with others openly, can lead to what Chris Andersen would refer to as "crowd-accelerated innovation". Empowering only a few voices often leads to ideas only from a few people, which does not tap into the ability that we have to flatten our organizations in our world today. Sharing "voice" openly also helps educators to be more cognizant of their digital footprint.

Idea: Similar to the #EDUin30 initiative, staff could share through video reflections something that they have learned at a professional learning day, or on a monthly basis that could easily be compiled into a Storify document to be shared with the community. Some people are not comfortable sharing on video, so they could easily share to a hashtag a picture, a blog post, or any other type of media. This really taps into the "wisdom of the room", and could have a major impact on the culture and community, when we see everyone as a teacher and a learner.

"*What if every teacher tweeted one thing a day that they did in their classroom to a school hashtag, and they took five minutes out of their day to read each other's tweets? What impact would that have on learning and school culture?*"

Other elements that could be incorporated: Reflection, Connected Learning, Self-Assessment, Critical Thinking

Choice

Rationale: "Owning the learning" helps to ensure that the learning actually happens, yet a lot of professional learning is top down and decided for individuals. A.J. Juliani, in his post "The Struggle to Do Work that Matters", shared this quote from Simon Sinek.

Tapping into one's passions for learning, is more likely going to lead to people not only going deep, but embracing what they have learned, and giving them the opportunity to lead, hopefully developing "intrapreneurs" and innovators within the organization.

Idea: EdCamp has been sweeping the entire world, and is a great way for educators to have ownership of their learning. Sessions are developed, created, and led, by educators that partake in the event, which lead to rich and deep conversations, because the people

in the room are passionate about the topic. The EdCamp format is something that should happen a lot more in professional learning days with schools. Many would say that this is not something they have time to do with a limited amount of time for professional learning, but if "learning" is the priority of the school, creating time and opportunities for deep learning should be the norm, not the exception.

Other elements that could be incorporated: Voice, Reflection, Critical Thinking, Opportunities for Innovation, Problem Finders-Solvers

Reflection

Rationale: Reflection is not only powerful for learning, but powerful for personal growth, and should be embedded into all of our professional learning days. Although collaboration is an important process to growth of an organization, people need time to process ideas and thoughts, and without actually having that time to think, we lose out on many voices. Also, learning is deeply personal, and without reflection time and having the opportunity to connect your own ideas and personal learning to what is being shared, it is harder to go deep into ideas.

I reflect, therefore I learn.

This is something that is necessary in our learning environments today.

Idea: One of the practices that I have done at my workshops, is that I will share ideas and some of my thinking, but then give an extended break with reflection time embedded into that time. I will use something as simple as a "Google Form" to give people an opportunity to process their thoughts, while also tapping into the power of open reflection. Knowing that your thoughts are going to be open to not only each other, but the entire world, sometimes help people process and think deeper about the ideas that they are about to share. As Clive Thompson suggests;

"Having an audience can clarify thinking. It's easy to win an argument inside your head. But when you face a real audience, you have to be truly convincing." *Why Even the Worst Bloggers are Making Us Smarter*

The one element of this that is really important is asking people to not only share their thoughts, but to ask questions moving forward. Asking questions is often more important to learning than knowing answers because they drive us forward. As I have

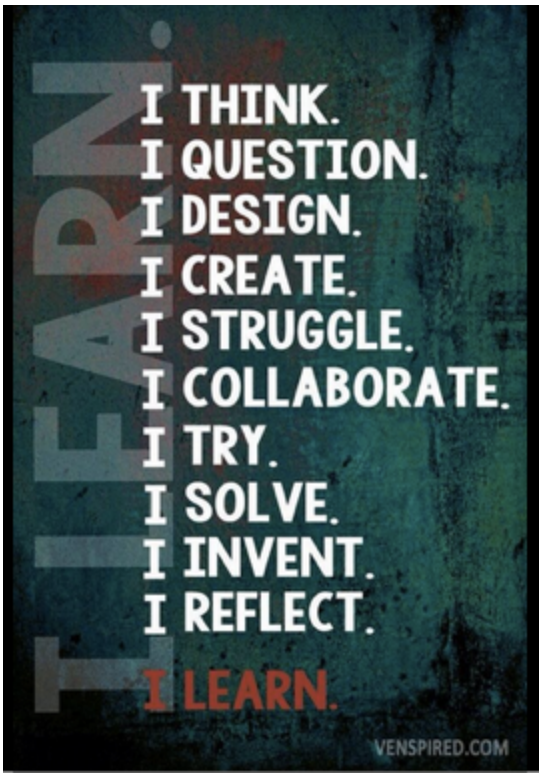
said before, ***school should not be a place where answers go to die, but questions come to life***. Asking questions is imperative in the reflection process.

Other elements that could be incorporated: Voice, Self-Assessment, Critical Thinking, Connected Learning

Problem-Finders/Solvers

Rationale: Ewan McIntosh has a brilliant Ted Talk discusses the notion of "problem-based learning" and how it is not beneficial to give students problems that aren't real. Instead, he focuses on the idea that students need to be "problem finders"; being able to find some tough challenges and then being able to solve those problems. If we are to ask students to find and solve problems in the classroom, it is essential that we put ourselves in situations where we are doing the same in our work. How often are we put in situations as a staff where we are asked to identify and solve problems as a staff on our pursuit to creating better opportunities for our students? Short answer; not enough.

This visual by Krissy Venosdale should not only be reserved for our students, but everyone involved in education as we are all learners:



These are all crucial characteristics of the problem finder/solver, and something that we should work to develop at both the individual and organizational level.

Idea: Recently, I wrote a post on the idea of "Inquiry Based Professional Learning", and tweaked the introduction from Alberta Education on Inquiry Based Learning to reflect the importance of the process for staff;

> *"Effective inquiry is more than just asking questions. Inquiry-based learning is a complex process where ~~students~~ learners formulate questions, investigate to find answers, build new understandings, meanings and knowledge, and then communicate their learnings to others* ***to create real solutions to improve learning and the environment of the classroom(s) and school****. In ~~classrooms~~ a school where ~~teachers~~ administrators emphasize inquiry-based learning, ~~students~~ staff are actively involved in solving authentic (real-life) problems within the context of the curriculum and/or community. These powerful learning experiences engage* ***and empower*** ~~*students*~~ *staff deeply."*

If you read the comments from the post shared by others, you will not only see ideas from schools around the world that are already doing variations of the process, but finding it powerful in their professional learning. By looking at not only challenging the way schools are, but empowering our community to act upon their solutions, this could be a very valuable process in helping our organizations move forward, while modelling the type of learning we want to happen in our classrooms.

Other obvious elements that could be incorporated: Critical Thinking, Voice, Choice, Opportunities for Innovation

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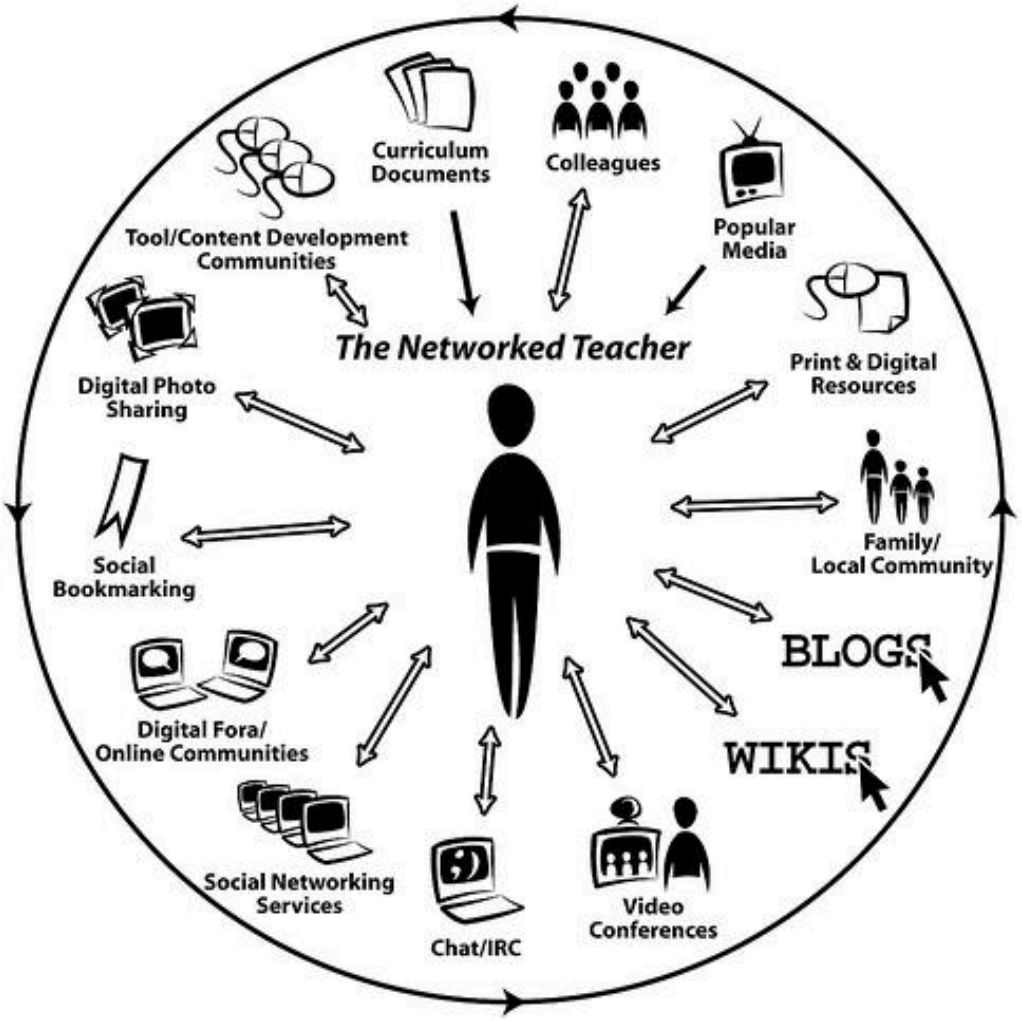
Connected Learning

Rationale: The opportunities for learning in our world today are immense and we need to take advantage of the opportunities that are presented to us. **We not only have access to all of the information in our world today, but we have access to one another.** This has a major impact in our learning today. What I have started to notice is that you can see some major benefits of being connected in the classroom for

the learning environment of our students. Access to one another can accelerate and amplify powerful learning opportunities.

Alec Couros, shared the following image on the idea of "The Networked Teacher";



Although the technologies can change and how we use them, the most important part of this visual, in my opinion, are the arrows that go back and forth. More and more, educators are becoming both consumers and creators of information, which is accelerating the opportunities for our students.

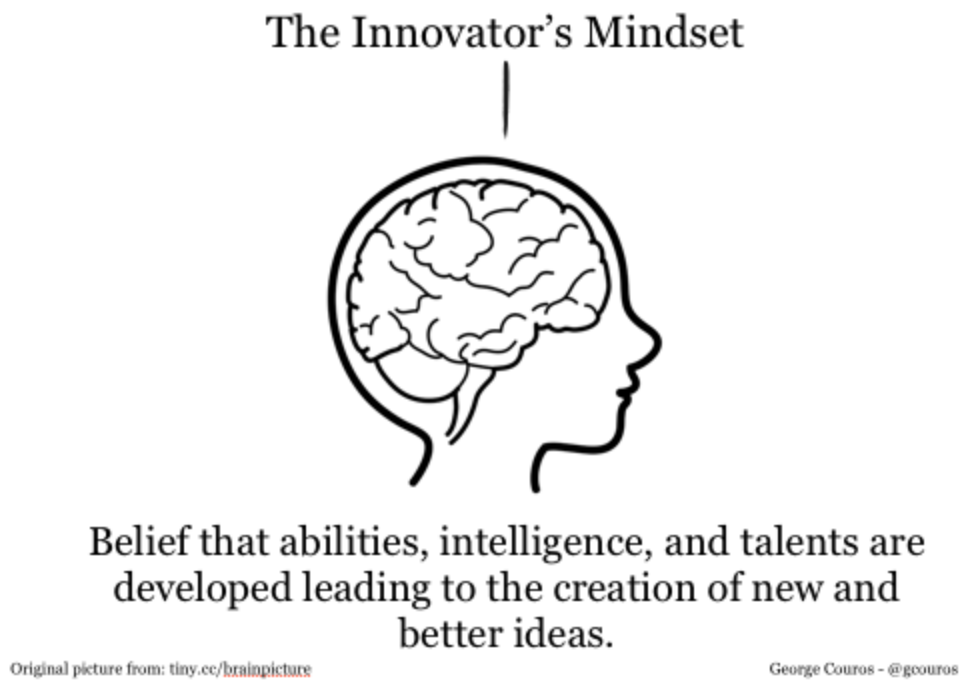
Idea: The idea for this is simple. If we see connected learning as something that is having an impact on the learning of our students, we must embed time into our work day and professional learning opportunities to help educators develop professional

learning networks (PLN's) and leading them to resources such as the "Edublogs Teacher Challenges" might help them get started, but face-to-face support is also crucial. To be honest, the technology to connect is simple once you get the hang of it, but it is developing the habits to think about connecting in the first place that truly make the difference. Differing between the time when you "google" something versus asking the same question on Twitter can not only help you get better results, but in the long run, save time (which no one has enough of). To be successful in helping people develop professional learning networks is to narrow the focus on the tools that are being shared with staff. It is not to limit staff on what they can use, but spending professional learning go deep into the process. We need to do less, better. Taking the time to connect can make a major difference in the learning of your staff, and ultimately, your students.

Other elements that could be incorporated: Reflection, Voice, Choice, Opportunities for Innovation

Opportunities for Innovation

Rationale: If we want innovative students, we need to focus on becoming innovative educators. It is not that "innovation" is new in education, but the opportunities that exist in our world today make innovation more possible. To help develop the "innovator's mindset", schools and organizations have to embody certain characteristics that create an environment where innovation will flourish. Again, as in all elements shared for professional learning, it is essential that time is provided to help develop this mindset.



Idea: My good friend Jesse McLean has promoted the idea of "Innovation Week" for his students, but knew to really have this to be successful, educators would have to partake in this type of process. He developed the idea of "Educator Innovation Day", to give educators the time to tinker and develop innovative ideas both inside and outside of education. This goes to the idea of developing "intrapreneurs", and as Jake Swearingen has stated, these intrapreneurs are essential to driving change within an organization.

Chris Wejr also shared his ideas on how to actually embed time through "Fed-Ex Prep" for teachers to encourage time is taken to create innovative ideas within education. There is also the opportunity to adapt Google's famous "20% Time" into learning at our schools, for both students and staff. None of these ideas have to be taken "as is", but can be adapted to tie into the communities we serve. What is (again) essential to the success of developing educators as innovators is both the priority and time being put into the process. In a world where developing innovators and entrepreneurs is essential to the forward movement of our schools, we need to create professional learning opportunities that see "innovation" as a necessity, not a luxury.

"If something is missing, we need to create it. In this case, if there are no entrepreneurs, we need to make some. And to make some is to instill the

entrepreneurship spirit into our children from the outside through education." Yong Zhao

Other elements that could be incorporated: Critical Thinking, Choice, Connected Learning, Problem Finders/Solvers

Self-Assessment

Rationale: School has been set up in a way that we have become dependent upon someone else telling us how we are doing in our learning. It is not only in our report card system, but also our evaluation process of educators. Students will encounter bad teachers, teachers will encounter bad principals, and principals will encounter weak superintendents. If we create a system that becomes dependent upon someone above else to tell us "how we are doing", this quickly falls apart when that someone is not strong. Having your own understanding of your strengths and weaknesses, is hugely beneficial not only in education, but in all elements of life, whether it is personal or professional.

Idea: Blogs as Digital Portfolios are an opportunity to not only showcase learning, but an opportunity to take time to reflect and grow from the process. Having my own digital portfolio for the last five years (this blog), has helped me grow more than most professional learning opportunities that have been given to me. I have collected and developed resources on both "how" to create a digital portfolio, and the power of learning through this type of self-assessment. I feel that there is more growth in this type of process because I own my learning; it is not graded by someone else, but also documents my learning process over time so that I can easily see my own growth.

Although there may be "guidelines" that must be done for teacher evaluation (three visits into the classroom, etc.), having educators their own ongoing portfolio is a great opportunity to shift the conversation from the "evaluator" to the "learner". For example, the traditional conversation that has happened in evaluations is that observations are shared from the viewpoint of the administrator, to a teacher. Conversations can be started from these types of evaluations, but from my experience, the focus is far too great on the evaluator than it is on the teacher. By using a digital portfolio process as part of the (self) evaluation, the conversation can simply be started by asking the questions, "Where are you strong and where do you need to grow?" The shift in this process is to the learner, and as Dean Shareski has stated, blogging is a great way to develop better educators. Putting an emphasis on this type of self-assessment is not only

beneficial to the individual learner, but when shared openly, can help drive change. The more we are able to see and understand the learning of other educators both inside and outside our organizations, the more we can tap into one another to drive positive change.

Other elements that could be incorporated: Reflection, Voice, Critical Thinking, Connected Learning

Critical Thinking

Rationale: In this video on "Critical Thinking", this visual is shared to help us better understand elements of the process:

In a world where information is in abundance, it is important for our students to be able to take information, understand their own thoughts and biases, as well as develop criteria to evaluate information, while developing questions to challenge conventional wisdom. The image below shares what developing "critical thinkers" moves us towards;

Although this is something that we are looking for in our students, do we promote this in meaningful ways with our own professional learning? Not just by learning about "critical thinking", but pushing our own organizations by encouraging this within our organizations. If we are ever to move forward as schools, we need to have leadership open to people asking questions and developing what we already see. A flattened organization is the only place that this type of thinking will thrive.

Idea: There has been a lot of information shared throughout this document, and I think that this gives us an opportunity to challenge our conventional wisdom of professional learning. As I stated earlier, these are not "prescriptive ideas", but my own thoughts on how we can revamp professional learning. This is not "black and white" but grey. Is it possible with staff to develop criteria on what successful professional learning looks like, and then develop new ideas on how it could be implemented.

What I would love to see in our schools is this process being implemented on an individual basis where staff share what they believe to be successful personal learning,

and provide a plan on how this could be implemented at a personal level. Is it possible to develop individual learning plans for ourselves to really take ownership of our learning? Can we take what we know, and apply it to better professional learning for ourselves?

Other elements that could be incorporated: Opportunities for innovation, Voice, Choice, Problem-Solvers Finders

Concluding Thoughts

Professional learning in many places, needs an overhaul. I see educators go to places like EdCamp and share how excited they are about the opportunities for learning that happens at those types of events, yet it is rare that I see people sharing how excited they are

Element	Activity	Links/Resources
Voice	#EDUin30 type activity Tweeting one thing a day of the learning that is happening in your school	What is #EDUin30?
Choice	#EDCAMP professional learning day	What is EdCamp?
Reflection	Embedding blogging time into learning or even something as simple as giving people time to reflect on what they have learned throughout the day	Create a survey using Google Forms
Problem Solvers-Finders	Inquiry Based Learning Professional Development	Inquiry Based Professional Learning
Connected Learning	Using Social Media to develop their own learning networks (The networked learner	Edublogs Teacher Challenges
Self-Assessment	Blogs as Digital Portfolios	Resources for Digital Portfolios
Critical Thinkers	Developing Criteria for what powerful professional learning looks like and helping to create the day.	What is critical thinking?

Opportunities for Innovation	Innovation Day or Genius Hour embedded into professional learning time	Educators Innovation Day Fed-Ex Prep Time