

Tech Community Connectors

Tech community connectors are technology-based activities that improve social connections and promote cohesion in four areas: academic applications, boosting benefits, content consumptions, and differentiated deliveries. Similar to movement community connectors, we need to use technology to our advantage as opposed to watching it contribute to interpersonal decline. Using technology activities to build community relationships among students will have a positive outcome on both comfort level and academic success in the MT classroom. Tech community connectors increase face-to-face interactions in conjunction with technology usage, resulting in effective cooperative learning and successful instructional delivery. Tech community connectors expand the way students interact with each other rather than limit those interactions. Students are given the freedom to embrace the technology they know and love while applying the social skills they are developing. Tech community connectors also provide an opportunity for students to build relationships in the classroom without sacrificing academic time. In fact, tech community connectors are often academic in nature. The key to promoting cohesion is to use each activity to harness the power that cooperative learning has on social and emotional development.

Academic application community connectors for building cohesion given in the following list:

- **Shared video/audio files and documents:** Using platforms such as VoiceThread or Twiddla, have students work in pairs or trios to upload photos, audio commentary, video files, or documents about a given topic. These files allow others to comment on, make changes to, and share the work. Students must work together to ensure that all uploads are relevant to the topic and add value to the lot as a whole.
- **Video Hosting Sites:** Using platforms such as SchoolTube or YouTube, students work in pairs or trios to create and upload a mini-lesson to be shared with the class. The goal is to have them teach the content or concept to their peers through a video presentation. For example, students might be required to create a three-minute video explaining the rules for singular possessive nouns versus plural possessive nouns. Each student needs to be present in the video and play an active role in the instructional delivery.
- **Cooperative writing:** Students work in small groups or teams to collaborate and write a single document. This can be done using platforms such as Google Docs. Students work together in real time to contribute, edit, make changes, or comment on a shared and original writing assignment. Students must work together to develop and agree on the content and final product.
- **Presentations:** Using a variety of programs (such as PowerPoint, Google Slides, Prezi, or Swipe), students can collaborate in small groups or teams to create multimedia projects about a given topic. Students can combine a variety of media such as photos, music, or narration to customize their project and make it unique to the group.

- **Illustrating software:** Create a place for the class to upload photos about a given topic. Using sites such as Flickr, Google Photo, or Photobucket, students can add photos to the group assignment. For example, given the topic of butterflies, students might find and add photos of different species, images of the life cycle stages, map shots of butterfly locations, and so on.
- **Current event tweeting:** Each student must tweet about a current event. The event should include a link when possible and must include an original hashtag so both teachers and classmates can locate and track the tweets. Require students to post one original current event tweet and to comment or reply on the tweets of two other classmates.

Boosting benefits community connectors for building cohesion include the following:

- **Remediation groups:** These groups are intended to boost learner benefits by creating a homogeneous lesson that is tailored to the pacing of students who need remediation of a given topic. Using Google Classroom or social media sites, create a group of students who are working on below-level material at the same time.
- **Enrichment groups:** Similar to remediation groups, teachers may use Google Classroom or social media sites to create a group for those who are working on the same above-level material.
- **Tech talks:** Using apps such as Google Hangout or FaceTime, have students collaborate with partners or in small groups for a peer-tutoring question-and-answer session(s) about a given topic. One person in the group will be designated as the “expert” for each tech talk. The group is then given the opportunity to ask any questions they may have. For example, an excellent geometry student might be the “expert” for the tech talk on finding distances and midpoints on a coordinate plane. That expert would answer questions for the other students in the group during the conference.
- **Personalized learning experiences:** Allowing students some choice in the technology devices they may use allows for a personalized learning experience that not only boosts the comfort level of the individual student but also fosters camaraderie among students who choose the same devices. For example, when requiring students to conduct research, allow students to choose the group of devices they’d like to join. Some students may prefer to use the iPads, while others might use their smartphones or the classroom Chromebooks. Allow the students who are using the same devices to congregate together in the classroom to encourage sharing of resources, conversation, and collaboration.
- **Resolving conflict:** Conflict in the classroom (or in any group of people working together) is bound to happen. Often, conflict remains unresolved with children and teens for many reasons: fear, embarrassment, peer pressure, and so on. Using anonymous polling software to resolve conflict is a great way to open the lines of communication with the students and allow the power of anonymity to assist in conflict resolution. Apps such as Show of Hands allow students to be heard without saying a word at all.

- **Online discussion boards:** Creating an online forum for students to converse and debate has a variety of learner benefits. In addition to providing more opportunities for students to engage with each other, discussion boards require students to adhere to a code of respect and kindness in their written words. Students learn to interact with each other in a civilized and mature way and to listen, respect, and respond to the thoughts and feelings of others. It also provides a great opportunity for teachers to remind students that their written words leave a permanent footprint. Google Groups or Edmodo are two great places to start an online conversation with your students.

Content consumption community connectors for building cohesion include the following:

- **Simulations:** Simulations are experiences that allow students to engage with and solve problems that mimic real life. Using premade online simulators (refer to Chapter 7 for examples) or teacher-created experiences, students must collaborate with each other to solve a problem. For example, high school economics students can work in small groups to play the Tax Game (<http://econ.glendale.edu>), in which they must design their own tax system and can see the system's results. Simulations require students to engage in conversation with the others in their group and relate to the thought processes of others.
- **Video conferencing:** Allowing students to interact with people outside of the classroom to gain knowledge is a valuable tool for consuming content and building community. For example, invite a board member of a local business to Skype into your business and marketing classroom or invite a local zookeeper into your science classroom. Students are given the opportunity to engage in respectful dialogue and establish a rapport with the expert. Video conferencing is also unique in that the students can improve their communication skills by interpreting the body language and nonverbal cues of the speaker.
- **Cooperative reading:** Devices such as Kindles and iPads take reading assignments to a whole new cooperative level. Students can share the books they are reading with each other, take and share notes on the text, share sections of the book or specific passages with one another, and even leave comments throughout the text for others to see.
- **Multiplayer games:** Educators need to tap into the potential of online multiplayer games to build classroom cohesion. Interactive games such as The Sims allow students to build relationships with each other, learn about community and culture, and broaden their perspective on life issues.
- **WebQuests:** Similar to simulations, WebQuests are a great way for students to work together to dive into the content. Working in pairs or trios, students engage in a variety of task-based discoveries involving a specific topic. To complete the quest, students must navigate the tasks together, take turns, and learn to work at a pace that is comfortable for each of the partners. It allows students to consider the needs of others and discover ways to help their peers when needed.

- **Review games:** Online game builders such as Kahoot, Jeopardy, or Quizlet are great ways to get teams of students working together to review content. Interactive games require teamwork and collaboration and encourage students to support one another.

Differentiated delivery community connectors for building cohesion include the following:

- **Digital chats:** Using technology is a great way to get students talking with each other. Although the ultimate goal is to increase face-to-face conversations with students, starting at their comfort level allows students to work on the basics of discussions first: kindness, equal contribution, questioning, and clarity. Allow students the option to conduct their discussions through digital means such as e-mail, texting, or instant messaging.
- **Social media groups:** Create homogeneous social media groups. Add students of similar ability to those groups. Post challenges, discussion starters, or interesting video clips to the group and encourage students to comment and respond to the posts as part of their class participation or daily grade.
- **Student-Designed graphic organizers:** Students should work in pairs or trios to create graphic organizers for specific topics. Allow the students the freedom to choose the direction of their graphic or image. For example, students studying the history of mining in the U. S. could create a relative statistical graphic. Submissions might include a spreadsheet of the market prices of mined minerals over the last 100 years, a bar graph showing the decline of coal mining in the 20th century, or a timeline showing the demise of copper mining in Butte, MT.
- **Learning games:** Learning games and software cannot be underestimated for building class cohesion. Similar to review games, students enjoy the sense of teamwork and unity that comes from playing games together. Examples of using technology to foster cooperative game play are Pictionary on the whiteboard, online BINGO, online Hangman, and digital charades such as Heads Up.
- **Recording software:** Use recording software, such as Audacity, to record class discussions. This recording provides an opportunity for the students to play back their discussions, reflect on their dialogue, and evaluate the effectiveness of their communication.
- **Flexible grouping:** Create differentiated groups in the classroom by using flexible grouping. Using a tool such as Google Classroom, teachers can assign different tasks to different groups of students. These student groups are interchangeable at any time, which encourages students to work with a wide number of others within the class rather than remaining in the same group for extended periods of time.

An interconnected community in the MT classroom is a group of students who come together for a common purpose. The students work toward creating a learning environment that satisfies their emotional needs and respects the emotional needs of

their peers. In the MT classroom, using both movement and tech community connectors fosters a classroom of kindness, respectful collaboration, and fun! Students will be excited to be a part of a classroom where they feel respected and important. Educators will be proud of a classroom that is restoring the faltering social skills of today's child. The balanced MT approach fosters an academic environment where both students and society win!

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO ME?

K–12 Teachers

1. Regularly include activities that allow students to work with a partner or partners while moving, such as think/pair/share on the move or partner-content walk and talks.
2. Implement activities that require the entire class to work together to accomplish a goal, such as a scavenger hunt or Jeopardy on the move (set up multiple Jeopardy boards around the classroom and allow students to circulate and play at each center).

Administration

1. Lead your faculty in designing specialty events that occur throughout the year and focus on social interaction and building school morale.
2. Create routine initiatives with your faculty that build social connections, such as peer partnership programs or clubs (before, during, and after school). Encourage teachers to mesh communal activities with their academic content as standard procedure.

Educational Leaders/Affiliates

1. Recognize and compliment schools that develop programs that create a community environment that focuses on students' social well-being and growth.
2. Develop policies that measure and place weight on emotional intelligence in conjunction with academic knowledge.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- The emotional state of a student drives their attention, which directly affects learning and memory. If the brain-body connection is not in a positive state for our students, then optimal learning cannot occur.
- Negative emotions in the classroom such as anxiety, stress, and exclusion control our reactions and our level of engagement in the classroom. Positive relationships in the classroom are essential for increased academic achievement.

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