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of tools and strategies (both virtual and in person) for meaningful professional development that can be shared throughout your school, your local community and the global online space. Consider the book to be an introduction to a community of learners much like yourself. None of the solutions provided in this book is a quick fix or simple tweak. Each requires a redirection of your current efforts and an application of your talents. However, the rewards will be bountiful. Once you take control of your own professional learning, you will be energised and amazed by the powerful, generous colleagues you have across this planet. Dig in. Power up. Connect!

How to Read This Book

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I wrote this book to provide you, the learner, with an easy-to-follow resource guide to help you realise the power of both physical and virtual learning communities. Each chapter includes practical teacher cases, face-to-face protocols, tech tools, research snippets and key ideas. Look for the icons below to help you navigate the text.

Educator Cases

This icon signals an educator's story or experience related to the topic or chapter at hand. It will describe, in detail, how an educator faced a problem, addressed it and moved forward. These cases also serve as good discussion fodder at faculty meetings or department meetings.

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Face-to-Face Protocols

While most learning opportunities in this book relate to learning in virtual or online spaces, there are also times when face-to-face interactions fit your needs as a learner. This icon will denote these protocols and suggestions.

Research Snippets

This book strives not only to give you practical tools and tips to accelerate your professional learning in both physical and online spaces, but also to share research that supports digitised learning. When you see this icon, you are hitting a 'research section' in the book. If you're not interested in the research, feel free to skip over the section.

Key Ideas

This icon alerts you to a key idea in the text. It means that what's contained in the adjacent passage is critical to understanding social, digital learning.

To-Do Lists

This icon (at the end of each chapter) coincides with a to-do list. One of the most frustrating things about trying something new is figuring out where to start. Each list gives you three to five actionable steps to move you forward in your journey toward user-generated learning.

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Meet Angelina

Angelina was a first-year teacher. Her class was a bustling melting pot: she taught students from seven different countries. A few of her students did not speak English, and several had individualised education plans. Each week, a consultant came to her school. During her prep period, the consultant helped Angelina revise and refine her lesson plans and units. While this type of support was helpful, it didn't meet all of Angelina's needs. Angelina was still struggling to differentiate her lessons to meet the needs of *all* her students. Angelina really needed to connect with other educators who were successfully reaching their English language learners and special education populations.

One day, while Angelina was surfing the web for examples of idioms to share with her students, she found a collaborative project called the Winter Wonderland Wiki. The wiki was looking for classrooms across the nation to work together on an interdisciplinary project. Students would post poems, drawings, and temperature measurements in their towns or cities, creating a global exchange about winter. As Angelina navigated the site, she realised that a teacher, just like her, was running the site. Feeling brave and a bit reckless, she fired off an email to the organiser.

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Within a few hours, she had a response from Mary, the organiser of the project. Mary taught second year at a primary school. Mary asked Angelina if she'd like to Skype to learn more about the project and how to set it up.

They set a time to Skype, and soon Mary's class was showing Angelina's class how to add to the project. Angelina's class was really excited to work with students across the country.

Before long, Mary and Angelina were exchanging emails regularly. Mary encouraged Angelina to join Twitter and follow other educators in the group. Although Twitter had always seemed silly to Angelina, she trusted Mary and signed up. Before long, Angelina was checking out a daily stream of lesson ideas and tools to use with her students.

To organise all the sites and resources that she found on Twitter, she started using Pearltrees. She would see a cool resource on Twitter, click on it, and then use the Pearltrees button on her browser to save it. Pearltree helped Angelina make collections of websites so that she and her students could easily find the games, animal information sites and kid-friendly news sources during guided reading or maths practice time. All the sites were saved online, so she could get to her resources from anywhere. Angelina's students were really excited each time she unveiled a new Pearltree in class, and many of the students' parents started using the resources at home as well.

After about six months, Angelina was feeling very comfortable curating digital resources and sharing them with other people she followed on Twitter. Several colleagues started to notice that things were changing in Angelina's classroom, and they asked how they could get involved. Before long, Angelina was sharing her websites, tips and tricks with almost everyone in her school.

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Angelina chose to take a risk and reach out to another educator on the web. The new connection not only made her a better teacher but also made her a better learner. Angelina is one of the many teachers who have turned to user-generated learning to improve their practice.

What Is User-Generated Learning?

User-generated learning is learning acquired through active curation, reflection and contribution to a self-selected collaborative space. This basically means that user-generated learning is something you *do*, not something you get. You have to actively participate in the process through searching, evaluating and sharing. In user-generated learning, everyone has something to contribute. We are all experts in our own ways. This doesn't negate the importance of educational research or vetted practices. Instead, user-generated learning reflects that all adults recognise their personal applications of ideas and strategies, and this synthesis and community are a valuable part of the learning process.

Let's break down each part of the definition provided above. First, user-generated learning requires curation. Curation is defined as the careful collection of relevant resources. Just like a museum employee, teachers must find and aggregate content that is relevant to the problems they are facing in their profession. Need resources for a new unit you are teaching? Interested in trying guided reading during your reading block? Need fun sites for students to use to practise mitosis and meiosis? Curation can help! Instead of relying on a content area expert or textbook, you are responsible for finding

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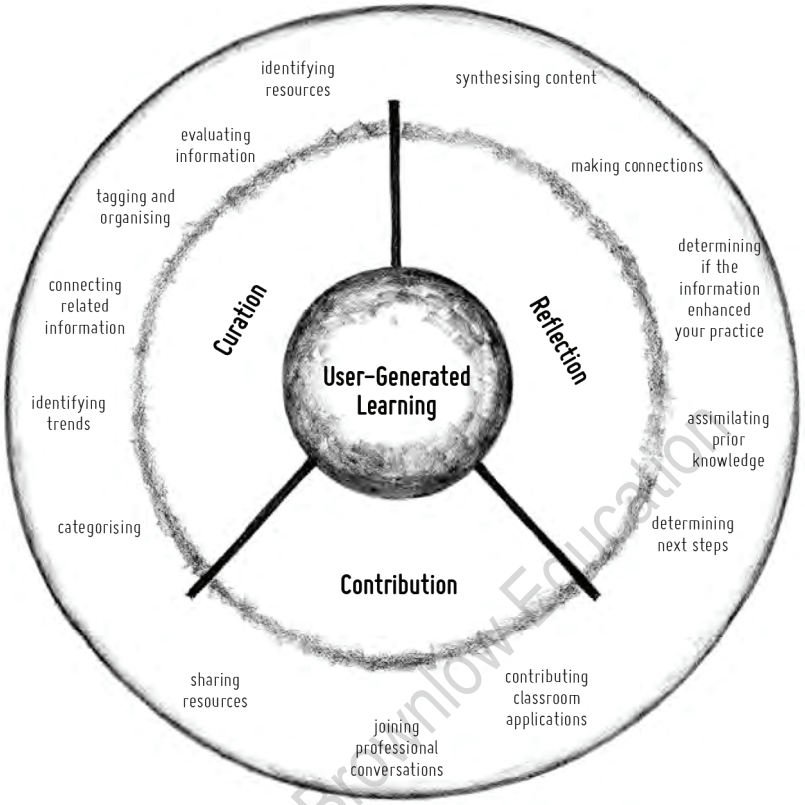

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meaningful information. Curation can occur in many forms, such as using file folders, saving pages from professional journals or copying article excerpts to share with colleagues. However, the Internet provides fantastic new tools that allow you to find, organise and share content in ways that were previously not possible. Further, using online tools such as Twitter, Google Reader, Pearltrees, iTunes U and Paper.li fosters sharing. You benefit greatly from what the community selects and shares. The community essentially serves as a functional filter to help you find the best content. By using the Internet to learn from lots of teachers, not just the teachers where you work, you will find better solutions that meet your students' needs. For example, maybe you are having difficulty engaging your

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