

Personal & AUTHENTIC



STOP & REFLECT

CHAPTER 1

Why are you investing your time into this book? What is it that you hope to get out of it?

When you hear the title “Personal & Authentic,” what comes to mind? What experiences in your classroom or school would you deem personal and authentic? Why?

How would you design a student learning experience if the quality of the relationship was at the core?

In this opening chapter, Tom shares two heartbreaking stories that happened during his first year teaching that significantly altered his lens as an educator. What personal and authentic experiences have impacted you as an educator? Discuss them as a group, and share one on social media, using the book’s hashtag #AuthenticEDU.

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CHAPTER 2

When you think of the words “school leader,” who comes to mind? What characteristics does he/she consistently display?

“In your classroom, school, or district:

- What are the shared attitudes of those in your school/district?
- What shared values are consistent among those that work with you?
- What shared goals are in place and owned by those on your team?
- What types of practices are most consistent?”

Do the attitudes and practices in your school propel, or hinder, learning that is personal and authentic?

Tom shares a story of an airport interaction with a veteran that had a significant impact on him. Think of a recent interaction that was personal for you. How was that interaction authentic in nature? What type of impact did it have on you?

Tom shares a story of his first superintendent that went out of his way to encourage him. What have these interactions looked and felt like for you as an educator? How have those moments encouraged you to do the same for others?

What do the first few moments of each school day or class period look like for you? What are you intentional about during that time?

Whether for your students or your teachers, how do you model risk-taking for those you lead?

What have you wanted to try in your classroom or school but have been hesitant to do? What support do you need to make it happen?

Share something from your classroom, school, or district that relates to #AuthenticEDU.

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CHAPTER 3

Tom shares a quote from comedian Michael Jr., “When you know your why, your what has more impact, because you are walking in or towards your purpose.” So, what is your why? What is your purpose? Why do you do what you do?

What’s your story? Which of your life experiences have been central to how you see the world?

Tom shares a moment on a train where he watched this video which caused him to pause and reflect. Take a few minutes to view the video and reflect. What are the “hidden stories” inside our students each day that have an impact? What are the hidden stories inside our colleagues that do? Share a time, without breaking confidentiality, when understanding a student’s hidden story, caused you to change your understanding of the student.

(For Personal Reflection) What “hidden stories” are inside of you? How do these personal experiences impact you as an educator? How do they impact the way you see the world?

Think of a student that you’ve worked with that had a difficult life story. In what ways did understanding his/her story help you maximize your impact?

Have you ever worked with a student who had significant medical needs? How did you ensure he/she was always included? What did you learn about yourself in the process?

How well do you know your students? How well do you know your co-workers? How well do you know their stories? How do these stories impact how you do what you do? What strategies do you use to get to know those people you work with each day?

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CHAPTER 4

What's one positive habit that you have in your life? What's one habit that you'd like to change? What about in your classroom or school?

It's been said that *"The world is full of willing people; some willing to work, the rest willing to let them."* Tom expanded on that statement to say, *"Schools are filled with willing educators; those willing to create the future and those willing to watch them do so."* Which one are you? How do you know?

Tom shares the story of Kenyan runner Hyvon Ngetich from the 2015 Austin (TX) marathon. In reflecting on that story, what's your marathon example? What race are you struggling to run? Do you have a clear vision for what you're working to attain?

10 Key Principles, as outlined by Digital Promise and the Institute for Applied Neuroscience, are highlighted in this chapter. Which principle resonates with you the most? Why? Which principles correlate with what you've read so far in this book? What's one principle you could focus on more in your work?

Is your classroom or building more learner-centered or teacher-centered? How can you continue to take steps forward, relinquishing control over time, to refine the focus on your learners?

What can you do for your next group of students that will give them a first impression that they and their families will remember for years to come?



CHAPTER 5

Think of a student you've had who struggled because his/her basic life needs weren't being met. How did you support him/her?

Tom shares some recent statistics around mental health and suicide, showing the obvious need for social-emotional learning. Without breaking confidentiality, upon reading that section, describe a child that was on your heart? What structures of support are/were in place for him/her?

What moments of awe occur in your classroom or school? How do the learners respond? Which ones do they remember years later?

In discussing relevant and contextualized learning, Tom poses the following two questions:

"What is the best professional learning experience that you've ever had and why?"

"What is the worst professional learning experience that you've ever had and why?"

How would you answer those two questions?

What experiences happen in your classroom or school that are relevant and contextualized? How do you know? What would your students say?

Tom shares a personal analogy in how his son and daughter, Caden and Paisley, are complete opposites in so many ways. If you are a parent, can you relate? As a teacher, have you ever taught siblings who are completely different? What have these experiences taught you?

Where in your classroom or school are students able to follow their interests, passions, and strengths? Are these experiences the norm or the exception?

What does consumption look like in your classroom or school? How is this information most often built upon for deeper levels of learning to occur?

In what ways do you leverage technology to promote a flexible path and pace?

What type of real-world learning experiences occur in your classroom or school?

Tom describes feedback-related experiences that many of us can relate to; the checkmark at the top of the page, the “Nice work!” written after hours of work completed, etc. When is a time that this type of experience happened to you? What feelings did you have as part of the experience?

What types of feedback do you give your students or staff that is most meaningful? What evidence do you have?

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CHAPTER 6

What was your earliest memory of using educational technology in the classroom? What did you learn in the process?

Tom shares a story of a lesson where he used technology and received needed (and necessary) pushback during the post-observation conference with his principal. Can you relate to this? Have there been times that you created a lesson because of the technology and lost sight of the learning goals? What did you learn in the process?

What's the best supervision conversation you've ever had that has helped change your mindset or alter an instructional practice? Why was it so good? How does that conversation help you give authentic feedback to your staff or students?

Reflect on a time when you used technology in a lesson and it did not go as planned. What did you learn from the experience? Then reflect on a time technology helped provide a more personal and authentic experience for your learners.

What has consumption-based use looked like in your classroom or school? How could you have taken that strategy up a level to promote deeper learning outcomes?

Since they've been a hot trend for some time, Tom shares various 3D printer examples; with some being used effectively, and others being a colossal waste of money. Reflect on a tool that you've seen used for very low-level learning and also used elsewhere for deeper level outcomes. What was the difference between the two experiences?

What equity issues have you seen in your classroom or school? What are you doing to support traditionally marginalized students to close opportunity gaps?

Evaluate the student demographics that participate in clubs, competitions, and other types of extracurricular activities. Is there a disproportionate representation of student participation in any or all of the groups? If so, what will you do about it?

Which students in your classroom or school do not have Internet access at home? What are you doing to support them?

Reflect on your classroom space or one in your building. Why was the space designed as it was? What does the space indicate about your beliefs about how teaching and learning occur?

Tom outlines three areas highlighted in research on spaces: *naturalness, individualization, and stimulation*. How do the evidence-based thoughts that you read correlate with your classroom or school? What's one change you could make?

How do inclusive spaces correlate with Maslow's Hierarchy? Is the space that you design inclusive for all learners? How do you know?

What do your learners think about your space? Have you asked? Have you leveraged the learners' voices to improve the inclusivity of your space?

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CHAPTER 7

Tom shares a story of a pro athlete that didn't "measure up" by the standard assessments that are used to define future success in his field. However, years later, he's known as one of the best to have every played. Without breaking any confidentiality, reflect on and describe a student that didn't perform well on standard metrics, but had the skills needed to thrive in life? How did that child's perseverance and resilience lead to their success? How did you support them in the process?

How do you model perseverance and resilience to those around you? What personal and authentic learning experiences do you oversee that promote the growth of these life skills?

Have you ever felt like you weren't modeling what you asked your students or staff to do? How did you remedy the situation?

When's the last time you failed forward? How were you impacted by the experience? If at school, how were your students affected?

Tom shares many examples of people that failed in their career, only to become household names down the road. Besides these well-known examples, who inspires you to fail forward? Who needs that same inspiration from you?

Tom writes how *"Moments of uncertainty create opportunities for your leadership legacy. Failing forward with perseverance disciplines our own expectations, pushes us to keep trying, and ultimately empowers us to lead from within. It is your display of humility in the best of times and your fail-forward mindset and perseverance during the difficult times that will make those around you want to follow."*

How do you model this type of mindset to those around you?

(Personal Reflection) “Teachers: Which student in your classroom is discouraged and needs additional support to fail forward? How will you support him/her?

-or-

Administrators: Which person on your staff is discouraged and needs additional support to fail forward? How will you support him/her?”

What’s something recently that you’ve had to unlearn and then relearn? What emotions did you feel in that process? What type of growth occurred?

Every educator works to help students own their learning. How do you model that to students in your role?

How can you help students develop both agency and empathy? How do you model empathy in your daily interactions with those around you?

Tom shares another story that has impacted his life about an interaction he had with Gus, a professional shoeshiner. Do you know a personal and authentic person like Gus? What lessons does that person model of how to be an incredible educator?

What is it that gives you hope as an educator? What hope do you have for your students and those who serve kids alongside you each day? Do they know you feel that way?

What’s next for you? What is it that you commit to do to continue to move this work forward? What steps will you take?