

## Foreword

The hackerspace housed in the Atlas Institute at the University of Colorado Boulder, where I currently work, is called the Blow Things Up (BTU) Lab. Its name—which apparently is not widely embraced by the university administration—reflects several facets of the space, including the playful qualities of both the physical space and its participants and the ways in which conventional notions of learning, inventing, and investigating scientific ideas are taken apart and reconfigured. According to its website: “The BTU Lab is a place for experimentation and hacking. We make science fiction science fact and vice versa.”<sup>1</sup>

The BTU lab is open to the public during its monthly hack nights and provides a space for a broad range of participants to engage in transformative practices. On the day that I visited, a graduate student was patiently constructing high heel shoes from a 3D printer (a thirty-six-hour process that she had to restart when the printer was accidentally unplugged), while other people were engaged in ostensibly more serious experiments with the wide range of materials available to them in the lab.

The spirit and commitments of the BTU Lab are at the heart of Kira Baker-Doyle’s timely book, *Transformative Teachers: Teacher Leadership and Learning in a Connected World*. The affordances of our digital age have meant that teaching and teachers have been transformed through new technologies and the new types of interaction with other teachers available to them, in much the same way that Atlas’s hackerspace is transforming teaching and learning on the CU Boulder campus. Like the hacking practices Baker-Doyle describes in her portraits of teachers and teacher communities, the Blow Things Up

Lab is focused more on creating new ideas and products than the disruptive connotations generally associated with its name.

As a new, young teacher in the late 1970s, I benefitted from the teachers' center movement in Philadelphia that has many connections to the current work described in this book, where I met new colleagues as we constructed innovative materials for our classrooms, including number boards from cardboard, and pegs and weaving looms from abandoned large heavy cardboard tubes and thin nails. Like the teachers Baker-Doyle describes in her book, I learned from other teachers as we shared ideas and constructed materials that helped us teach in new ways. A group of teachers that profoundly shaped my understanding of teaching as a new teacher and continues to influence me today, the Philadelphia Teachers Learning Cooperative (PTLC), began in one of these teacher centers funded by the School District of Philadelphia. After the school board discontinued funding for teachers' centers, a group of about fifteen teachers decided to continue to meet every Thursday afternoon after school in one another's homes to examine their teaching practices and learn with and from each other. The group uses a set of structured oral inquiry processes developed with Patricia Carini, founder of the Prospect Center for Education and Research, to describe children, children's work, classroom practices, and educational issues that grow out of the daily work of teaching.<sup>2</sup> The group's approach to learning is captured in this description by Carini:<sup>3</sup>

Slowness: to pause. Slowness: to linger. Slowness: to practice acts of attention. Attending, to learn to see in the child's dancing, the child's storytelling, the child's painting, the child's construction—in the child's play—how this child particularizes and selects the world, learning it actively and in the process of that making, making her own self as well.

The opportunity to focus on the strengths and interests of children—and their teachers—provides an important counterpoint to the current movement to evaluate teachers based on their students' scores on standardized tests through what are called value-added measures and the focus on deficit language that is so prevalent in our discourse about students, teachers, and schools today. The PTLC continues to meet regularly, though most of its

founding members are now retired, alongside the plethora of teacher activist networks and online communities described in this book. As Baker-Doyle explicates, these varied opportunities to learn together have transformed the work of teaching for those lucky enough to join a network or find an electronic or physical space for teachers. Although the slowness that Carini describes is much more rare in our increasingly technological and social network, the emphasis on making (along with hacking, connecting, and designing) as a centerpiece for learning and knowing has remained constant. Neither the teacher leaders described in this book, nor the members of the PTLC, advocate for blowing things up, yet their work provides a radical vision of teaching that is an important counternarrative to the dominant discourse of teaching as preparation for high-stakes tests that is so prevalent in the United States and much of the world today.

In contrast to so many of the portraits and reports in the mainstream media, Kira Baker-Doyle provides an optimistic view of the teaching profession and the possibilities for its transformation through the leadership of teachers themselves. While there has been much needed attention to the problem of teacher retention along with the dire consequences of teacher shortages, this book provides compelling portraits of teachers who choose to stay in the field along with detailed descriptions of the actions and networks that support this decision. Through technologies that support collaboration, leadership, and participatory practices that reinforce democratic forms of schooling, teachers have found ways to share their understandings, collectively organize for equitable and inclusive practices, and form new alliances that make their lives and work better and more satisfying. Although the media has primarily focused on why teachers leave, Baker-Doyle focuses instead on why teachers stay and the technological affordances that support them to continue to do so, while making their knowledge and choices public.

In the early days of 2011, as Baker-Doyle mentions, the Arab Spring began in Tunisia when a produce seller set himself on fire. Word of his actions spread rapidly through social networks across Tunisia, throughout the Arab world, and around the globe. Within hours of the event, the texts, tweets, and videos spawned protests across Tunisia. The protesters demanded political freedom

and freedom of the press, wielding social media as a weapon, despite the censorship that had previously silenced their voices. They metaphorically blew things up through the power of words and actions. In the United States, when an Oakland, California, labor organizer wrote a response on Facebook about the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the wake of the shooting of Trayvon Martin, the hashtag #BLACKLIVESMATTER was born and came to symbolize a growing movement in which activists have seized social media to organize and make their voices heard. Baker-Doyle explains how the hashtag has been used to identify a range of teacher communities, often signaling the transformative and equity-focused potential of collective action and social media for the teaching profession.

In recent years, activists have deployed social media to engage in political activity and register their outrage for the conditions of their lives. This same use of social media has been taken up by teachers as individuals, and perhaps even more powerfully, by groups of teachers organized in a wide variety of social networks. The power of this book is that it provides an explanatory framework for this phenomenon engaged in by teachers, as well as a call to action for new and veteran teachers, teacher educators, and activists to understand, participate in, and extend the use of new technologies and social media. As such, it reflects one of the most optimistic views of the future of teachers and schools that I have read in a very long time.

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