



Matt: Hey everybody, this is Matt and Laura Grundler, welcome to the Creatively Connected Classroom. We, I think are both super giddy today, and excited about our current person we're gonna be talking to, author and artist Peter Reynolds. And we just want to thank Peter for being here, and ...

Laura: The constant support to teachers and creatives around the world, we're just really thankful to have a connection with you, Peter. Thanks for being here.

Peter: Yeah. It's awesome, great to be connecting today. But I feel like we connect a lot, and I love seeing everything you guys are doing to support the arts, and creative thinking. Because I think that's really, ultimately that's what we're about, I think some people make the mistake that it's all about splashing paint. We certainly love splashing paint, right? But it's really splashing ideas and connecting with each other in creative ways, and that's what's been great about technology. We've been able to, you guys, myself, we've been able to connect and feel very close. And even if we're not communicating directly, with Twitter, just seeing what you guys are doing and the conversations you're sparking, makes me feel so good. It makes me feel like, yes, the mission, it's working. We're moving this thing forward.

Peter: Anyways, really awesome to connect with you guys and your amazing audience. I know you've done such a great job at finding all of these incredibly creative thinkers out there, and together, connected, I think we can do amazing things.

Laura: We agree. Which is a lot of the reason for the name of the podcast, we call it the Creatively Connected Podcast, because really to us it's about collaboration and that deep creative thinking, as much as it is about the making. But we want kids to be inspired by creative thoughts and the process, just as much as the making.

Matt: And to have purpose, I think the biggest thing you were saying, we love to splash paint, but it's also having, splashing that paint with a purpose. Thinking about where that splash is gonna go.

Laura: Which leads us to our first question about you, Peter. Will you tell us a little bit about your journey, or your path to becoming a creative, and maybe a little bit about your why for what you do?



Peter: Sure. This is an eight-hour ... The nutshell version is that I was born in Canada, 1961, on a snowy March day, the 16th. But I was not born alone, I was born with my collaborator, my dear, dear friend and brother, Paul Reynolds. I think that being a twin, you automatically start off the journey in a really unique position, because you're not alone. You really understand the power of connection, the power of having someone by your side, the power of kindness, the power of collaboration and support and brainstorming. And we just grew up doing that. And Paul, still today, he's by my side, not with me today by my side, but in spirit. He's off visiting schools right now, he's also ...

Peter: He's an author, he's also an illustrator, which I'm trying to coax him to illustrate one of his own books. Which leads me to say that coaxing and the nudging, the support, that's part of my mission, that's my why. What I do, what I do, because I know how good it feels to let what's inside out, in creative ways. And I think everyone should experience that, and it doesn't have to be with a pencil or a paintbrush, it could be with a song, it could be with your garden, your photography, with great conversations, creating an amazing meal and bringing friends together. So many ways of letting you outside, and share it with the world. And I grew up in a big family, we had lots of kids in our family, five kids, and mom and dad. And dad was born in Argentina, mom was born in England.

Peter: My grandfather was born in New Zealand, and grandmother was Scotland, and Paul and I were born in Canada, of course, and my sister was born in the United States. So we call ourselves the Journey Family, and there're some families, you're born a certain place, your parents were born there, and you love it and you stay there. And it's great and next generation will be there. And then there are lots of us who were new to this country, and we've had long journeys to get here. I think that especially probably now more than ever, this idea of a journey family is really relevant.

Laura: Absolutely.

Peter: This country, talk about creative connections, there's so much cool stuff that's happening, that we're adding to the palette of this country. There're some people out there who don't see it that way, they're afraid of color, they're afraid of mixing colors and blending and experimenting. And I think it's really exciting to have all of these cultures connecting in really cool ways, and being inspired by each other, tasting their food and seeing the way they express themselves through clothing and through feasts and through tradition. I think that's a big



part of my story, is being that journey family, and making my home here in the United States, which I love. We grew up in Chelmsford, Massachusetts, which is not far from Boston.

Peter: We started out in Somerville, Mass, which is a little bit more urban, and then we moved out for 2nd grade, we moved out to Chelmsford. And I remember jumping out of the car, and it had just rained, and we had, our house had a lawn, we didn't have one in the city. The first thing Paul and I did, we took off our shoes and socks, and we ran through the wet grass. Sometimes people ask me, they're like, "How come your characters don't wear shoes?" And I think maybe that might be ...

Laura: I would think so.

Peter: I think there's something of that freedom, taking your shoes and socks off and running through the grass. And I think that's another thing that I'm trying to inspire in my work, is this idea of freedom, and removing the constraints, and being more in touch with nature and the world and experiences and ourselves.

Laura: I loved your images you posted before the elections, about getting people out to vote. Just hearing you say the word freedom made me think about that, because I believe there was one image that actually said freedom, and they were just so ... I re-posted them over and over again, everybody needed to vote. I think that's one of the things we generally, authentically connect with you one, is that you're out there inspiring people to do good. I so appreciated that you did that, and it wasn't anything political, it was just, "Go vote."

Matt: It wasn't one side or the other, it was, "Go do this."

Laura: It was beautiful. So thank you for doing that, by the way.

Peter: Thank you. I appreciate that. And I think to myself, "What can I do?" Yes, I can draw and I can write, and I also have, I love technology, I think it's a really cool way to share ideas and important ideas too. The idea that everyone should vote, to me, is connected to, every voice matters. That's another passion of mine, is to really make sure that everybody knows that everybody has a voice. Some of us are really good with words and we're okay with jumping on stage and sharing loudly, and some people are very, very quiet. I'm fascinated with the private wonderful worlds that children have, and adults too, there's a lot going on inside those heads. That's why creative teachers know how to take a peek inside, and



gently invite kids to say what they're thinking, what they're feeling, what they're dreaming.

Peter: That's magic, when people are brave enough to share a little bit. And then say, "Do you know what? That felt pretty good, and I'm still, I'm okay. Maybe I'll do it again, and maybe I'll do it a little brighter or a little louder." I have a new book coming out, which is very much informed by that thinking. It's called, *Say Something!* And the tagline on the back of the book is, "The world needs your voice." It goes through all the different creative ways that you can say something. And again, some people are very good with words, some people, they can do it in creative ways. That's what I think our work, my work, your work, the work of our audience, we're all trying to find creative ways to invite kids, and grown-ups too, to share their voice. Because it does matter, there are some very loud boomy voices out there right now, drowning out the more nuanced poetic voices and marginalized voices.

Peter: This book, more than every, is more like a rallying cry than a book. It's like, "All right, guys, let's all step up and be a bit braver and share." Share our good ideas, how to make it better.

Matt: You brought up a really good comment just a second ago, talking about how good teachers, or creative teachers, can really bring out the creative component in kids. If you could think about it, was there a teacher that you can think about, or someone that inspired you to really just pull that creativity out of you?

Peter: Wow. There are a couple of teachers along the way that come to mind, and people have heard me speak, probably have heard the story of my math teacher in 7th grade who noticed that I loved to draw. His name was Mr. Matson, and a lot of teachers would say, "Mr. Reynolds, eyes up front. You can do that on your own time, focus." There's a whole list of things I heard. But my math teacher, he noticed that I loved to draw, and he asked me if I could use my art, storytelling, and my imagination to teach math. It blew me away, because I'm like, "Wow, I thought ..." Number one, I thought I was gonna be in trouble, right? And number two, it's like, "Wow, he just mentioned three things I really love." Storytelling, imagination, art, and he added math, and then years later I realized he added a really cool powerful word.

Peter: He added the word teach. So he was a teacher asking me to teach, which is, when you talk about creative thinking, that really flips the paradigm around. And



so I made a comic book to teach math, came in, showed Mr. Matson, and Mr. Matson took a look at it, and he said, "Peter, do you know what you've done?" I made a comic book? And he's like, "It's called a comic book, but it's also called a storyboard. It's what a filmmaker uses to plan out a film. How would you like to make an animated film?" And so it was getting beyond amazing, here's my math teacher saying let's make an animated film. So I'm like, "Yeah, let's do it." And he's like, "I actually, I have no idea how to make one."

Peter: Which I think is cool, because I think it's encouraging to have teachers have the really good idea, just have your brainstorm, and don't worry about how to get it done. Figure that out later. There's an old Irish, is it a proverb, or a little story where there's a farmer and he's walking across the field, and he gets to a really tall wall, a fence, and he can't get over. It's too tall for him to get over. So he takes his beloved woolen cap from his head, and he throws it over the wall, and that's the end of the story. If you think about it, he threw it over the wall, because he knew there's got to be some way to get that beloved cap back. And so in the same way, have your great idea first, then figure it out later.

Peter: Then what the cool thing was that math teacher said, "There's somebody up at the high school that I've heard about who's really creative." So he found this guy named James Morrow, he was teaching media at the high school, and it turns out he was just an incredibly creative guy. He made comic books and he made film, and he designed boardgames, old fashioned boardgames. And he came down to the junior high and helped teach us how to make an animated film, so at age 12 I made my very first animated film to teach. The cool thing too, was that my math teacher learned how to make an animated film. So when I think about it, he asked me to be a teacher, and he became a student. He was learning alongside me, I was teaching alongside him, and I think that's a fun creative challenge for anyone that's working with kids. Whether it's in school or after school programs, or just families hanging out and thinking, "How can we make this a richer journey?"

Peter: Change up the roles, be a teacher-student, or a student-teacher.

Laura: How vulnerable and authentic for him to be able to say, "I don't know how to do that." I think that's a struggle for a lot of teachers, because there's this paradigm that we're supposed to have all the answers, and we don't.

Peter: Everything about everything.



Laura: But I think that's so wonderful to kids, for the kids to hear, that we don't have the answers, but let's figure it out together.

Peter: And actually, that's a 21st century skill, locating expertise. If you don't know something, someone out there does. That's actually, in the real world, in business, if you don't know something, there's a consultant, there's another business, there's a best practice. It's out there, you just have to know what your problem is that you're trying to solve, and then find your expert. They could be local, they could be on the other side of the planet, now with technology, which is so cool.

Laura: I loved, I feel like a fan-girl, but the work that you've done with the Four Cs, and getting that message out there about the Four Cs and 21st century learning. I've used some of your work in presentations I've done at other school districts, and it's just so important for people to be able to think about those Four Cs. I'm curious why that's important to you.

Peter: I think that the emphasis, especially in public education in the United States, has been, especially in the past I'd say 15 years, we've become very test-centric. And there's this emphasis on memorizing content, and of course spitting it back on the test. And learning is so much more than that, and Paul and I often say that there's education and then there's learning, and then there's personal development. In the end, personal development's probably more important than any of that, of memorizing the state birds and the chemistry chart. Personal development are those life-long skills.

Peter: Of course the Four Cs, for people who might now know what those are, there's communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and then of course our favorite is creativity. I love creativity. And then Paul and I lately, we've been throwing in a fifth C, which is compassion. Because you can be really good at communicating and collaborating and thinking critically, and even being creative, and if you're not compassionate, you're missing the point, we think. Because we're all hopefully trying to make our communities better and kinder, and I think you do have to be mindful of that, and have kids say, "That's actually a goal, to be compassionate and to be kind." Why are you learning all this stuff? I love asking kids that.

Peter: I'm like, "You can read, you can write, you can problem solve, who cares?" They look at me like I've got two heads, I'm like, "Yeah, so? Big deal. What do you



plan to do with that?" That to me, that's the cool question. Okay, yeah, you know a lot of stuff and you know how to do some stuff, and you can problem solve, mm-hmm (affirmative). But now what? That's why I wrote the book *Say Something!* I wrote a book called *The Word Collector*, which is the joy of words, just falling in love with words, even words you don't understand. Just collect them and then of course, once you've collected your words, what are you going to do with them? Words are powerful, and ideas are powerful, so how are you going to use your time, talent and energy to make things better?

Peter: Because the world is in a bit of a mess right now, although as you probably know, I'm an optimist.

Laura: Happy dreamer.

Peter: Yeah, I am a happy dreamer. And even when things get tough, we've had, certainly there's a lot of tragedy that's been happening, a lot of violence, a lot of hate, and yet I still hold fast to this idea that there is more good than bad in this world. More light than darkness. And that we, together, can make more light. The minute you give up on that notion, it gets darker. I think that's been probably one of the reasons why the world has gotten a bit darker, is that people are running a bit low on hope and optimism. And when you say, "It doesn't matter, nothing I do will change it," you let darkness get another few steps deeper.

Peter: I think that's one of our ... My mission, and I know your mission is to bring more light through creativity and the arts. It's really critical right now, I would say more than ever.

Laura: I couldn't agree more, I was just thinking, every time we have a podcast discussion, we always ... We're the parents of three kids that are 12, eight and six, and we're always thinking about them and their future. Our middle daughter's middle name is Hope, actually. There's always a future, there's always possibilities of amazing things, and it's teaching them to see that optimistic side of things, and to be able to put the puzzle pieces together. And teach them, kids will tell you, "Just search it up." They can look anything up on Google, but they need to be able to connect the dots, for lack of better words. Sorry. They need to be able to connect the dots to figure out how can they make a difference in the world, and what are some things they can do. Even now, at their young ages of six, eight and 12, to have a purpose.



Matt: Yeah. You were talking about the Four Cs, and it's funny, because Laura does the Four Cs equals the fifth C.

Laura: Yeah, I do. I do a little PD about the Four Cs equal the fifth C, which is if you have those Four Cs, you can start to make choices as an artist.

Peter: Love that.

Laura: Thanks.

Matt: But the reason why I was thinking that, is also in your story you were talking about your math teacher who saw a creative side to you, and knew where to reach out and where to go. It made me really think about your book called Going Places, and that everyone in the book is following the step-by-step, following the directions, except for this one kid. And then this one kid joins together with this other kid, and then that whole collaboration piece, and more or less, STEAM comes into play with that. What is your connection, what is your why for choosing STEAM, and being able to write about it?

Peter: Thanks for mentioning Going Places, that's a collaboration with my twin brother, Paul. That grew out of some work we did for the Partnership for 21st Skills, it was a coalition trying to figure out, what are the pieces that we're missing in school. People, there's this conveyor belt, and then the kids get dumped out at the end. And then people in the workplace are like, they got a diploma, they have no idea how to communicate an idea, they don't work well, they don't have a lot of experience working in teams, they don't know how to problem solve. If it wasn't in a book or on a test, they're baffled in the workplace. They're like, "What?"

Peter: And they're certainly not as creative. And so they came to us to say, "Is there some way to tell that story?" That these four things especially are incredibly important if you're going to try to make your way through the world and have a career or a mission. We came up with a film called Above and Beyond, and it's a little animated film, so if you do a little search on the web, you can find Above and Beyond: The Story of the 4Cs. In that, we have these two characters Raphael and Maya, and they, as you say, they have this project in school where all the kids are given the exact same kit. And Maya, of course goes off script.

Laura: Go, Maya.



Peter: Yeah. What was cool about that, is that Maya, it looked like she was daydreaming, because in the book you see her and she's not working on her project, she's in the garden and she's sketching. Of course, she's sketching birds, and if you think about it, Going Places is getting from point A to point B, and she was actually thinking of the big idea of Going Places. And whereas all the other kids, basically they had the instructions, someone else figured out how to build this thing, they followed the instructions, and they made their thing. Which is not an altogether bad thing, yes, you followed directions well. But creativity and innovation means pausing a bit, and saying, "Okay, I could follow the directions, or I could really wrap my head around the big idea."

Peter: So if the big idea is motion and travel and getting from here to there, let's think creatively of all the different ways you could that. And so really digging into the essence versus the details, and that's something that Paul and I both are really fascinated with, essence versus details. You can get lost in the details, and forget, like a 30,000-foot view of ... Which is actually, sometimes kids will say, "Why am I learning this?" And we always say, "That's a really cool question."

Laura: I love it when they ask that.

Peter: Isn't it great? And if a kid says, "This is boring," instead of arguing with them, I like to say, "Well, how boring is it?" On a scale of one-to-ten, maybe we should graph this. And honor the idea that it's boring, because to them, in whatever, in 3rd grade, the way this is being presented to them, it's boring. And so we can either change it up and present it in a brand new way, or ask them to present it in a brand new way. Or you can say, really honor it and say, "Okay, I'm with you, it's boring. Next question, what is not boring?" And to me, that is a really cool question to ask kids.

Peter: What is not boring? Because that gets them one step closer to finding out what their calling is, their passion, what sparks them. And every kid is gonna be different. If you are mindful, if you do really search in your heart and your soul about, "What's the thing that sparks me?" We don't give kids a lot of time to do that. It can change your life. I was talking to an astrophysicist the other day, in the bookstore, we were sitting having coffee. I said to him, and he's retired now, but he still meets with other astrophysicists and they read books together and talk about the universe, they have these mind-blowing conversations.

Laura: They think really deep thoughts.



- Peter: I said, "When was the first inkling that you were going to be an astrophysicist?" And he said when he was about seven or eight years old, he looked out at a field of wheat, and he saw the wind running across the field, and he noticed the patterns that the wheat were making. And he said it absolutely fascinated him that there was this interaction between wind and the wheat, and that these patterns had to have some meaning. I just think that's so cool that looking at a wheat field, you can see a kid looking out the window of a car, thinking they're lost in thought, they're not really lost in thought, they're voyaging into their thoughts and making discoveries.
- Peter: And for that little boy, he suddenly became fascinated with motion. And he said anything that moved was interesting to him, and what was causing it to move, and where was that energy coming from, and what happened when it was over. Did the energy disappear? It was so cool to hear him show how the dominoes started falling for him. So anyway, finding out what is not boring, finding out what is exciting, what's the passion, and then how can we support that? I know it's a challenge, because teachers have so much on their plate. There's so little time, and kids are hungry, and they are distracted, and there's lots of things going on. How can we create these little magical moments, where those kids can find that spark?
- Peter: That spark can be that first little dot on their page, and Vashti's teacher said, "Make a mark, and see where it takes you."
- Matt: See where it takes you, that's awesome.
- Susan: Hey there, friend. It's Susan Reilly from Education Closet, I am in awe of this interview right now. Not only is Peter a fantastic illustrator and author, he's also a huge advocate for STEAM education. Did you know he actually presented a keynote at our summer online STEAM conference? If you missed that event, you can still catch up with an on-demand ticket. For a limited time, you can get a 20% discount off the regular price. Just go to [ArtsIntegrationConference.com](https://www.ArtsIntegrationConference.com) and find all the details. Now, let's get back to this great conversation.
- Matt: Wow.
- Laura: I don't even know what to say to that, I get teary-eyed sometimes, because I just think that's really what it's all about, is finding those little moments for kids.



- Matt: When you were talking about the astrophysicist, I was thinking about this little animation video that was talking about Vincent van Gogh, and how he was the first person to really give a visual sense to wind and what it looked like. And how, through his painting *Starry Night*, and there was so much science involved that people were just so blown-away by it. Not until probably three years ago, people really started understanding that, and that's just ...
- Peter: Which is very cool in that, of course that makes me think that we as caregivers of kids, whether you're a teacher or just someone who's nurturing a child, finding, allowing all those connections to happen. Realizing history has a lot to do with science, and science has a lot to do with art, and art has a lot to do with theater, and theater has a lot to do with chemistry. There are all of these cool connections, and unfortunately, again, in public education in the United States, we have created these little silos. Especially in the upper grades, where, "Nope, you can only talk about chemistry for 180 days. Do not mention history, do not mention art."
- Peter: I think we really need to mix things up. And talking about Connected, Creatively Connected Classrooms, make these connections. It's really interesting. And I also, by the way, my soapbox about the theater, I think theater needs to be woven into every single classroom.
- Laura: We agree, as parents of theater kids.
- Matt: Three theater children.
- Laura: Our kids have thrived in their local children's theater, I've seen them come alive. And they have better understanding of so many ideas and all the connections we make-
- Matt: Even our six year old.
- Laura: And their confidence.
- Peter: And it is, it's that confidence. Being able to get up there on stage, which by the way, I did a little research on fears and phobias, and of course there was spiders and fear of heights. And at the top of the list, at least the list that I saw, was the fear of public speaking. I'm like, "Wow, that's mind-blowing that public speaking is so terrifying. Worse than spiders and snakes." I think that theater does teach you to be confident, and also try on some new costumes and new faces. And try



out being, let's say you wanted to be a scientist, it's like, "I don't know if I'm a scientist."

Matt: Just pretend to be one for a little bit, see if you like it.

Peter: And the cool thing is, with an actor, they're not really pretending, because what they do is they research. So if you're going to be playing a famous scientist, you've got to do all that research and find out not only what did they know, but what was their motivation. So you're getting into their skin, and saying, "Wow." And then it may or may not feel comfortable to you, or it may. You may say, "I think I am a scientist, I am curious. I'm fascinated, I'm a really good observer." Which I always remind people the connection between art and science, scientists observe the world, and artists do exactly the same thing.

Laura: Absolutely.

Peter: If you're looking at a tree, some people, yeah, there's a tree next to them, and an artist is like, "Wow. That is so cool."

Laura: The texture.

Peter: Right, the texture, and how those-

Laura: The colors.

Peter: -Split off, and what was the reasoning behind that, the way that split? And why is there still a bit of greenery on the very top of that tree? And they're really digging deep into what your eyes are seeing.

Laura: We've circled around the idea of mindfulness and social emotionally learning throughout this conversation, and I think that even in hearing about your new book coming out, Say Something!, and we know that you've done I Am Yoga as a collaboration, it seems like there's a lot of mindfulness components, especially in your newer works. Can you speak to that just a little bit for us?

Peter: Yeah. I think just instinctively I've been tuned into the mindfulness movement, even before it became a sanctioned movement in the schools. Because for me, being mindful, it's like all the stuff that is untestable. Again, I say public education, and I'm not leaning hard on public education, private schools also have their challenges. They do have a little bit more freedom though, and they



can get a bit more creative. I'd love to splice some of the DNA from private schools into public schools, and from the Montessori schools, and Waldorf. There's so many good ideas out there, and I really think in America, I don't understand why we haven't allowed there to be more innovation in schools, and really support it.

Peter: We have to support it through, not by just saying it's lovely, we have to support it with resources and funding. Funding, action, and also being very mindful about what our goal is. If we want our classrooms to be more creative, we do have to really focus on it. Back to mindfulness, I connected with Susan Verde, who's an amazing poet, writer. And we wrote a book called *The Museum*, so hopefully the audience has found that book. It was Susan's first book, and I illustrated it. I read it as a poem she had written, and I told her, I said, "Susan, this is not a poem, this is a book. And if anyone else illustrates it, I will be very upset." I illustrated that one, and a few more, but we did the *I Am Yoga* book together, and then *I Am Peace* was the sequel. And then just came out, *I Am Human*.

Peter: She is quite the mindfulness maven.

Laura: That's a lovely title.

Peter: She's just such a lovely human being, and kids are ... They're in school, they're trying to do well, and of course what does do well mean? I think there's been such an emphasis on, doing well is, I guess there's no other choice, you've got to get an A, right?

Laura: The GPA hunt.

Peter: Yeah. I want to score high on the test, I've got to get an A, and I have to get an A in everything. And that's heavy-duty pressure, and it's also, I think it's misdirected intention. The intention should not be to score high on every single test, it's to find joy in learning, it's to find joy in discovering who you are. The lovely thing about the mindfulness movement, is that we're slowing things down a bit, we're allowing kids to literally learn how to breathe. I'm also a big fan of breathing, I think we all should do more of it. I'd love your audience right now to take a really deep breath.

Peter: One, two, three, in, hold it, and release. Doesn't that feel good?



Laura: It feels awesome.

Peter: Right. It feels really good, and actually I like to tell kids, and grown-up kids too, that when I'm drawing, that's exactly how I feel. When that exhale just happened, and you can feel it in your brain, you feel your brain, it's like a sponge that's really tight, and then you let go of it. It has more room, and the oxygen starts getting back in there. Teaching kids how to cope, to navigate creatively on the journey, to teach them patience, to teach them how to listen, these are all things that again, we don't test them with a bubble test, because you can't. I think unfortunately, maybe the curriculum leans towards stuff you can test, because testing is data, and government funding is all tied with data.

Peter: You hear that term data-driven, and I just, it really disturbs me that there's such a pressure to respond to data-driven results.

Laura: Instead of children.

Peter: Right, instead of children. And realize, the real magic in school is somebody, a kid being noticed by a caring adult, and that caring adult really seeing their potential. And a lot of times it's seeing the potential in the kid, before that kid can see it in themselves. That is the miracle, the kid who's drifting and bored, hurt, confused, and to have an intelligent kind enlightened adult in their lives, to say, "It's gonna be okay, and I love you." Of course, we have to be careful these days in school about hugging and saying I love you, but I always remind people that there are creative ways to hug people. There're creative ways to say I love you.

Peter: By actually sitting, what I'll do when I visit schools, I'll have, a student will come up and they'll hand me their little poem. And rather than say, "Thanks," and sticking it in my pocket, I pause and I take time, and I'll read it aloud very slowly and carefully and with feeling. And I see their eyes light up, and they're like, "Wow. He read my poem." To me, that is a way for me to say, "I care about you and you're amazing, and I love you."

Laura: I'm gonna share my story from this weekend, I think that fundamentally what you just said is what all of our why should be as educators. I felt so privileged this weekend to be reminded of my why, I was at a state art educators conference, and I went into this supervisor session. And I looked across the room, and there was a young man that had been in my 9th grade art class. His name is David Moya, and he is a phenomenal human being. He's just turned out to be this



amazing art educator, he's out there supporting art teachers, he's working in a smaller school district as their supervisor part-time, and part-time at a university as an arts' education instructor.

Laura: It was my why, seeing him in that room and getting to sit down next to him, and spend some time with him. And thinking back to almost 17 years ago when he was in my 9th grade class, and thinking about all the struggles that he had at that time in his life. The return was, he introduced me as his art mom, "This is my art mom." That is our why. And not that every child will become an artist or an art educator or anything like that, but that they find their passion, and that we take the time to notice them. That's our why. It was really powerful for me, and I know that not all art educators get that opportunity to see their kids grow like that.

Peter: I think if educators knew that the power of what they were doing, as they were doing it, they would probably do it more often. Because sometimes it does take 15 years to realize, you'll hear back from that student, and realize, "Wow, really? I did that? I said that? They remember that?" And a six-minute conversation can change a kid's life. You may not know that for years and years, but I think we have to just be reminded. That magic is happening all the time, and sometimes you don't even know you're doing it.

Peter: In fact, I call it accidental brilliance. Teachers, creative teachers, they do go off-script, you have to. You've got 28 kids in front of you, or surrounding you, they all are learning differently, some are exhausted, some are having a bad day, some are excited to be there. Everyone's completely different, and you're trying to do a group activity, and it's just sheer magic I think to keep it all together. Anyway. Sometimes, I think what I was gonna say was, when you're having to think on the fly, you're juggling all these things, and you see this kid, and you're like, "Oh. I don't even know if your brain is processing this task." But it's probably saying in your head, it's like, "Okay, this kid is so close to getting it, if I describe it by saying ..." and then fill in the blank.

Peter: Then you see their eyes light up, like, "Ah." And you're like, "Wow, that worked." That worked, and I encourage teachers to write those teaching aha moments down, because that, again that accidental brilliance. Number one, do it again, and number two, if you shared those little nuggets with other educators, they're gonna be like, "Hey, I'm gonna try that, or I'm gonna try a variant of that." And that's where my book *Ish* came out of, me just winging it



with a group of kids. There was a kid who was ... I ask everyone to think about creating a fable, and I say, "Everyone create an animal, and then we're gonna match them up and we're gonna write stories." So I thought that would be the easy part, making the animals.

Peter: This kid was drawing, everyone's at their easel, and this kid's making this tiger, and I'm like, "Oh my gosh, that could be in the Museum of Modern Art, it's the coolest looking tiger." I'm like, I'm gonna have to go over and give him some props. So I was busy talking to a girl, I turn around, I look at him, he's got this big eraser and he's erasing this gorgeous ...

Laura: No.

Peter: Exactly, that's exactly probably the noise I made as I lept in an arc across the room over desks. I ran over to him, I'm like, "What are you doing?" He's like, "Eh, it was supposed to be a tiger and it doesn't look like one." And it just popped out of my mouth, I said, "It's tiger-ish." And he whipped his head around with a smile, and he's like, "Tiger-ish?" "Yeah, it's your version of a tiger. You could take a photograph of a tiger, this is actually much more interesting to me than a photograph of a tiger. This is really cool."

Peter: The kids in the room, they could see that I was excited and this thing was going on, and they came running over with their drawings. And they're like, "Snake-ish, monkey-ish." Man, that went viral in a classroom within seconds, and I thought to myself, "Wow, ish. That worked." So I took a piece of paper and I wrote it down, "Ish" on a piece of paper, and just tucked it in my pocket. I kept it there for months, but of course it became my book Ish, which might be my favorite book that I've ever done. Although, I have some close other favorites, but I think that one's a pretty good one, not only for kids, but for adults too.

Peter: Because we're all hard on ourselves, and again, I think because of the paradigm of, "You've got to get straight As in every single subject," there's this super heavy pressure of getting it right all the time. As we know, innovation is all about actually turning things upside-down, not knowing what's going to happen, making mistakes, breaking the rules. It's about not getting it right, and yet, that's exactly what needed to happen for the breakthrough.

Laura: Awesome.



- Peter: I'm hoping everybody out there does some ish-full thinking, and together let's creatively reshape this amazing landscape of learning and self-discovery.
- Matt: I was gonna ask you for some final words, but I think that pretty much encapsulated that.
- Laura: I think you just did it.
- Peter: I think my other final words are that this audience ... My work, I appreciate that people like my books, but my real joy comes from seeing educators and parents and caregivers activate those ideas, and share them. And also, to really listen to those messages personally. Because I think a lot of emphasis, we've got to help our kids, which is very important, but we also have to help ourselves. And we've got to especially take care of teachers and educators.
- Laura: Put that oxygen mask on.
- Peter: Right, because honestly, it is a tough job. We need to love our teachers more, and we've got to show them that we love them, and hug them in lots of different cool ways. And so I'm encouraging everyone who's listening out there to think creatively, how can you creatively hug and show your love for the great teachers out there, especially the ones that are sticking their necks out and leaning outside of the box. I love the outside of the box thinkers, and I always say, "I encourage you to lean outside of the box far enough so you don't get fired." Because we need to, but if you keep leaning outside of the box, and if you jump outside of the box once in a while and run around it, your administration will get used to you being the crazy one, but you're still holding it together.
- Peter: But I do think we need more adventurous teachers willing to take the risks, to make education more colorful, and enlightened, and be wonderful safe-havens for learning for everybody, for all ages. Guys, thank you so much for letting me hang out with you guys. We could, honestly we could probably do this for another seven hours together.
- Laura: Absolutely. I wrote that down in my notes, I'm like, "We were joking about eight hours, but we could have done it."
- Peter: And honestly, we could probably do eight days. I imagine this, a cruise ship with eight days to be able to read books together and splash paint, look at the stars, and recharge our batteries. All of us, together.



Matt: If you can make that happen, Peter, we'll definitely be there.

Laura: We'll be the first on board the ship.

Peter: Awesome.

Matt: Well, we enjoyed every second, I know I especially personally have.

Laura: We're gonna be walking on air for days on end after this, it's just uplifting, so thank you.

Matt: I can't thank you enough, and so we appreciate you so much coming onto the Creatively Connected Classroom.

Peter: Thank you guys, so much. And keep doing what you're doing, the world needs you, and it needs your whole audience. Let's all stay connected, it's an amazing network of kindred spirits. Let's work together to light up the world.

Laura: Thank you, Peter.

Matt: Thank you, Peter. Have a good rest of your day, and we will talk to you again.

Peter: Awesome.

Matt: All right, thanks, Peter.

Laura: Bye.

Peter: Bye.

Announcer: Head's up, seven up, friends. If you've been enjoying these episodes, be sure to subscribe to the Creatively Connected Classroom Podcast. You'll get a notification every time we release a new episode, each and every week. And take a screenshot and put it on your favorite social media, Twitter, Insta, Facebook, you name it. Tag Education Closet and K-12 Art Chat, so we can reach out and say thanks. And if you really love us with all the feels, give us a review and/or a rating over on iTunes. It helps others find the show and connect with our incredible community. Thanks for all your support.