

# The Ethics of Sharing

Based on an online conversation about teachers sharing their digital curriculum materials

## Sections

Technical Hurdles to Sharing Materials

Copyright

Time

Teacher Concerns

Quality Control

Administrative Supports

*When sharing materials electronically, I do find space/storage to be a hindrance. There is a limit to what can be sent over email, and saving items in t-shared can quickly consume available storage space. Much of what I use in my classroom is stored on my external hard drive.*  
--Stephanie

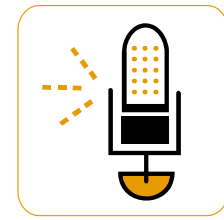


## Introduction

On the surface it is hard to understand why teachers don't share the burden of material creation rather than doing all the work themselves. Are teachers so invested in working long hours that they actually prefer to

do everything for themselves?

A recent discussion by elementary teachers in three schools focused on the implementation of the principles of Universal Design for Learning provides



valuable insight and suggestions for improving teacher practices around professional sharing and collaboration.

## Technical Hurdles to Sharing Materials

Most people think that digital files are much easier to share widely than paper materials, but digital media come with a new set of technical issues. Curriculum materials today include a variety of multi-media and are created in many formats.

Teachers report

- Files are often too large to email so an alternative must be found to a quick message with an attached file.
- There are concerns about privacy with
- sites that provide online storage space. Teachers must be careful about which tools they choose to post materials for others to use.
- There are multiple locations to search and upload – where to start? Where to end?
- Upload sites may not be well-organized making it hard to find what you are looking for or where to upload your creation.
- The purpose of multiple sharing sites may overlap making it hard to decide which to use.

## Copyright and Digital Materials

Many educators are confused about how copyright law applies when using clipart, videos, and text captured from websites.

*Since I'm not sure about the copyright laws relating to these issues, I feel it is better to err on the side of safety, and not share something that could include copyrighted material. --Lou*

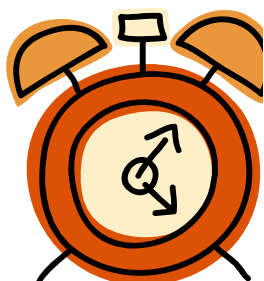
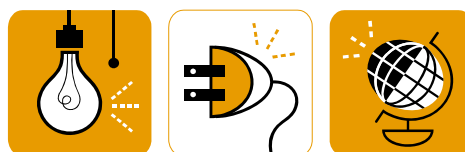
The most important guideline is to give credit to the source. This takes extra time, but as teachers, we need to model this behavior for our students.

Teachers should become aware of resources for digital media that are provided under a 'creative commons' license or where permission for use has been specifically granted to teachers.

The principals of 'fair use' apply to digital media as well as print and other materials. There are many misconceptions about fair use. Here is a [resource](#) to learn more:

<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/development/resources/fairuse/engage.html>

*Do we share only things we have personally created or do we share things we have "found" on the internet? --Marty*



### The Issue of Time

*When you are in the mode of creating something you are not sure how it is even going to play out and after you have used it you are on to something else and never thought to go back and upload that last item -- that's me anyway:) --Susan*

The ability to share materials – or at least to access a bank of shared resources – is highly valued by teachers.

*Maybe we are all creating the SAME activities and don't know it?!?! --Melissa*

Nevertheless, it takes time to find, download,

filter, and modify the materials found.

Teachers need to balance the time it takes to search for resources and learn new technology tools, with the time it takes to create their own resources from scratch within tools they already know well.

*I appreciate the MCPS 21 Century Classroom and Promethean Planet but have found that if I'm going to use those resources I have to take the time to go through them and tailor them to the needs of my class. – Marny*

Finally, to share materials, teachers need to prepare them for viewing by others, which means describing how they are used and thinking about where to post them to fit curricular needs so that others can locate them.

An attitude of professional collaboration and responsibility is critical. Administration also needs to encourage sharing and promote it by providing time in the schedule explicitly for this purpose.

## Teachers' Main Concerns

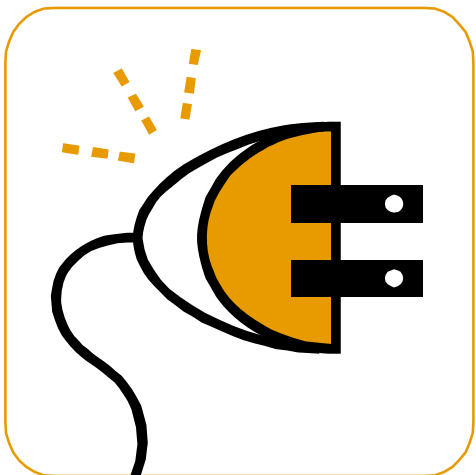


*It is easier to share with others when you know them and trust them. Sharing with the larger community is putting yourself out there to receive feedback for others you do not know.*  
-- Kim

- Product is 'untested' with students
- Don't feel confident that the product is good enough

- Unsure of the product's relevancy to others
- Concerns about copyright
- Concerns that administration or peers will judge the product poorly

*It just makes me that much more hesitant to post my own flipcharts to myMCPS, thinking that others will question the quality of my instruction too.* --



## Quality Control

Sharing sites can suffer from a lack of, or an overabundance of quality control. If the materials posted are poorly conceived then teachers will not spend time filtering them to find something useful. If

teachers are worried about how their work will be judged, then they will be unlikely to take the risk. If materials require review prior to posting, then the site will likely not be timely and useful for educators.

## Administrative Supports to Professional Sharing

Sharing and professional collaboration are fostered when these activities are part of the core values of the school and district. District-wide tools must

be provided for sharing that are easy to use, well-organized, and relevant.

A culture of sharing and recognition for those who take the time to

share their materials is key to making it happen.

*THANK YOU to those MCPS teachers who DO take time to share. I wish I did a better job.* -  
-Melissa