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Be like a virus and connect

My pleasure-reading list looks like few others that I know! Leaning heavily towards titles intimidating in both topic and length, I'm currently wrapped up in an early 20th century biography craze. I've plowed through tomes on Truman, Stalin, and Chairman Mao in the past few months. Understanding the motivations of leaders, seeing defining moments in history, and making connections to today drives me to the nonfiction section of the bookstore time and again.

Character in the face of crisis drew me towards the title I just finished. Written by John Barry, *The Great Influenza* documents the efforts of America's first medical pioneers to diagnose and treat the Spanish flu — a worldwide pandemic that killed more people in 25 weeks of 1918 and 1919 than AIDS has killed in 25 years. Faced with a world war, a buckling medical infrastructure, few resources, and a government in denial, courageous doctors and medical researchers risked lives and reputations against almost overwhelming odds to search for causes and cures.

But what caught my professional attention was the medical description of how the influenza virus — one of nature's most efficient creations — functions. Consisting of a sphere-shaped base covered by spikes of a substance called hemagglutinin, this virus travels through the body bumping into other cells looking for a "match." Most cells have little in common structurally with influenza, passing harmlessly and moving on.

But the sialic acids on the outside of respiratory cells are a near perfect match for the hemag-

glutinin spikes surrounding the influenza virus. When the two come into contact with one another, the virus bonds with respiratory cells like a hand fits a glove and begins its work. Until it finds sialic acids, influenza is horribly inefficient — and essentially useless. After bonding with respiratory cells, it becomes remarkably communicable.

In many ways, our work as teacher leaders mirrors the work of the influenza virus. We can spend months making contact with "cells" in our schools that aren't matches — and our work is as inefficient as hemagglutinin without sialic acid. Personally and professionally, we are weakened and isolated.

Once we find that match — our sialic acid, so to speak — we, too, bond and the results are amazing. A mental synergy consumes professionals "connected" in the work of education. Ideas

flow, mutating and transforming into increasingly perfect forms with each new exposure. Instructional practices improve and results are amplified, quickly spreading throughout teams and grade levels. Occasionally entire schools become infected, lucky enough to have like-minded professionals across grade levels and departments that "find" each other in the incredibly complex systems that are our buildings.

In the upcoming weeks, spend your energies trying to find your sialic acids rather than forcing ideas onto the cells that are not a match. Once you do, no one will be able to stop you. The combined energy that you create will be contagious!

Of course, some people are bound to get sick of you, but what fun would professional infection be if they didn't? ♦



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