DIGITAL LEADERSHIP

Changing Paradigms for Changing Times

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Foreword by
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Contents

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Foreword

I deleted my Facebook account in June 2013, after having it for about two years and accumulating nearly 1,000 friends. Why? I hadn't found a reason to use it.

Finding reasons to use technology is one of the biggest challenges educators and education leaders face. Very few technologies are originally invented to serve an educational purpose. Quite often they are pushed into schools because, with hundreds of millions of potential users, the education sector represents a huge irresistible market. Technology then becomes a solution looking for a problem—in a subculture that frequently perceives the introduction of technology as a problem rather than a solution.

Don't get me wrong; I am not a Luddite. To the contrary, I have always believed in the potential of technology for improving education. I began writing software to teach English in 1985 and have designed a variety of technological products to support learning. I have also helped teachers and school leaders adopt technology and conducted research on the diffusion of technological innovation in schools. If anything, I can be called a technophile.

What I've learned is that the great potential of technology to improve education is not automatically realized. In fact, it is quite often not realized at all. The history of educational

technology is filled with examples of unfulfilled promises and wasted investments that the technophiles don't want to talk about. From radio to TV, from multimedia to hypermedia, from films to the Internet, waves of modern information and communication technologies have promised to improve and transform education and have failed to do so. We can blame technology for its overhyped capacities, teachers for their unwillingness or inability to make good use of it, educational institutions for their stubborn resistance to change, or governments for their lack of sufficient investments. While the blame may appear justified, it doesn't accomplish anything. The constructive response is not to point fingers but to learn from mistakes.

One mistake has been an overzealous attitude toward technological innovation leading to the undervaluing of existing educational practices. Inspired by the great potential of technology, proponents wonder why everyone else doesn't "see the light" as they do. But the reality is that most educators feel fine with their own practices and are functioning satisfactorily in their work. The missing link is the thoughtful and meaningful application of technology to education. In other words, the potential of technology must be translated into meaningful solutions to educational problems. Only when such a translation occurs will the majority of educators find reasons to adopt it.

Eric Sheninger provides such a translation in this book. Drawing from his extensive experience as an education leader, Sheninger presents stories and examples of technology improving the effectiveness of schools. He frames technology as a solution to the "problem" of the school improvement mandate, from community building to communications, from professional growth to enhancing student learning, and from building a better brand to improving public engagement.

The aim of technological innovation is not only to enhance existing practices, but also to transform them. Humans develop technology to expand human capacities and occasionally to replace human labor in simple tasks. ATMs have largely replaced bank tellers, for example, as robots have replaced many workers on the assembly line. As a

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result of technological advancement, most industries in our society have undergone dramatic transformations and seek more complex human skills, knowledge, and abilities, which requires our students to develop different skills than their predecessors—skills that differentiate them from machines. Schools must adapt to help our children acquire these skills and knowledge.

Moreover, information and communication technologies have brought significant changes to the core business of schools. The teacher, for instance, has for a long time been the primary source of knowledge and agent of knowledge transmission for students. But that is no longer the case. Today's students theoretically have access to any information they desire and any expert they seek. This makes it necessary for teachers to seriously reconsider their role and their relationship with technology. If students can Google anything, why do they need teachers?

A redefinition of the role of teachers and schools has not yet emerged on a large scale. Sheninger pushes educators and education leaders to begin this work. More important, he uses meaningful examples to illustrate how we can begin the redefining journey.

I am grateful that Sheninger took the time to play with different technologies, to redefine his role as an educator and education leader, and to reflect on his experiences and put together such an excellent book. *Digital Leadership* provides a framework for leading educational transformation with technology.

Had I read this book earlier, I might have found my reason to stay with Facebook. Oh, well. I'm glad I am still on Twitter.

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Summary

As we move further into the digital age, it is imperative that school leaders develop a vision for the role that technology will play and establish a strategic plan for implementation across a broad spectrum. Moving from vision to action in this area can be accomplished by emulating the behaviors, techniques, and strategies utilized by highly effective technology leaders. Change in this regard requires establishing a clear vision, an inherent sense of value, embracement as opposed to buy-in, relevant professional development, and support. The Pillars of Digital Leadership provide the foundational elements to begin the process of transformational change using technological resources that perfectly align with national standards for technology leadership and frameworks for school improvement (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Standards and Framework for Digital Leadership

Digital Leadership Pillar	ISTE NETS•A	*Breaking Ranks* Framework
Communication	1, 3, and 5	CL[a]
Public Relations	1, 2, and 5	CL, PER[b]
Branding	2 and 4	CL
Professional Growth and Development	3	CL, CIA[c], PER
Student Engagement and Learning	1, 2, 3, 4, and 5	CL, CIA, PER
Learning Spaces and Environment	1, 2, and 4	CL, CIA, PER
Opportunity	1 and 4	PER

a. CL refers to collaborative leadership.

b. PER refers to personalizing your school environment.

c. CIA refers to curriculum, instruction, and assessment to improve student performance.