



MOBILE LEARNING MINDSET

**THE PRINCIPAL'S GUIDE
TO IMPLEMENTATION**

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INTRODUCTION

Campus administrators preparing to lead a mobile device initiative on a campus must wear many hats. Part of that role encompasses preparing and encouraging staff to take on the task of purposeful integration of technology in the classroom. Another part is modeling and setting the right amount of expectations for usage. In the community, you must be a cheerleader in support while also keeping an ear open for concerns. We will address these and many other issues that arise throughout this book. It's my hope that in reading this book, you will be armed with many different ideas and strategies to help you lead the way.

How to Use This Book

This book will serve as both a guide and a resource at times during various stages of your mobile learning initiative. The structure of the chapters in this book will mirror the structure of the other books in the series, though the content will differ.

The first chapter is all about the idea behind “flat leadership.” Creating a web of communication among campus leaders not only strengthens your leadership team, but also provides you with ways to get multiple ideas and strategies for improvement. Being a flat leader spreads out the responsibility and ownership throughout your staff.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to things to avoid when running a mobile device initiative. It outlines the top 10 things *not* to do from the viewpoint of a campus leader. Every campus has its own set of problems, from staff who are negative and dysfunctional teams to vocal parents who have only a limited view of the initiative and students who are tempted to do inappropriate things with devices. Identifying (and avoiding) common pitfalls can go a long way toward making the initiative a success.

Carl Hooker (CH): Tell me your origin story. What led you from your beginning in education to now being a leader of this academy?

Derrick Brown (DB): Wow! That's a great question. I never actually wanted to be a principal, much less a teacher. Coming out of college, I started working for a corporation (a large insurance corporation). Doing that every day, even though I was good at it, was really, really boring. I started to look around at people doing that same job for 20 years and how depressing that was.

So I started looking around and saw in a magazine one day an advertisement for alternative certification for teaching. So I took classes through Region 20 [Note: Texas has many regional centers that support districts with professional development] to become a teacher. Began teaching in the Edgewood school district.

I remember my first day in the classroom when the kids were there. It felt right. I knew at that minute this is what I'm supposed to do. Everything felt good and right. I was drained at the end of the day, and it was so hard, but I just loved it.

You know, it's the kids. The opportunity to work with kids and their energy and their excitement. I simply loved it. That was fourth grade, and I did that for a few years, then I started doing music after school. My father is a musician, and in the summers, I would tour Italy with him and the band and ultimately do music with the kids. Every day was a way I related with the kids. I would always look for new ways to engage them by creating songs about what we were learning. They would want to stay to learn whatever new songs we made about what we were learning.

I also did a lot of video with them. You know, back in the day, we had those big old video cameras. We would make plays and film them from different angles, making props, learning about perspectives, etc. That took so long! But you know the kids would stay forever.

I remember the first Mac lab we got. I used to follow the tech guy around on campus and just learn from him on his break. When he left, I ended up taking over a lot of the things he did, so I was sort of the tech guy. A little while later, the music teacher opening came up, so I started doing that. I love music.

You begin with a vision of what the end product will look like. From that idea, you build a plan. Part of that plan is researching what tools and strategies you'll need to use to do your project. Another part of that plan is estimating costs for materials and purchasing any extra tools you might need to complete the project. Before you start, you might also want to brush up on how to handle the tools and the best practices for using them effectively. After some research, purchasing materials, and reviewing the skills, you begin the project one step at a time in a logical order, so when it's finished, it will look like (or as close to) your original vision.

A home improvement project can be used as an analogy for your device initiative. We can draw parallels between them, such as the following steps we take to execute them:

- The Vision
- Research
- Tools and Materials
- Learning Necessary Skills
- Design and Building
- Evaluating the Final Product

Unlike home improvement projects, a mobile learning program has us working with people. People are far less rigid than a hammer, but it is possible for people to be as hardheaded! This, among many other factors, is why it is important to consider each step in the process. If we don't, sloppy workmanship will result in a sloppy outcome or could even result in total failure of the project. So, let's look at each step and analyze how you can use them to guide your campus initiative.

The Vision

When you set out to build your home project, you had an idea in your mind of what the project would look like. In fact, you could probably even visualize it. Sharing that vision with your spouse before starting the project would be a good way to avoid conflicts and differences in expectations (more on that in Chapters 5 and 6).

The situation is much the same way with a mobile device initiative. You and your team need to be able to visualize what you want a successful project to look like. Beginning with the end in mind, define the goals of what “success” looks like for your initiative. Gather feedback from a wide range of staff, community, and even students about what they define as a successful initiative. Knowing and communicating that end vision will help guide all the next steps of your initiative. Failure to do this “shared vision” exercise can cause many staff to feel disconnected and noncommittal about the project.

As a leader, much like a spouse in a home improvement project, you need to be comfortable altering your vision to meet the demands of others on your campus. If you want to roll out a 1:1 mobile device initiative or promote your shiny new bring-your-own-device (BYOD) policy, it would be wise to gather feedback from the staff. Sometimes having too many initiatives going at the same time can make the vision seem crowded. Failing to communicate the vision can make it appear blurry. Before you move further on, be sure the vision is shared—both in the sense that everyone feels ownership and in the sense that it has been communicated thoroughly.

Research

As I said in Chapter 2 (Ten Things *Not* to Do), you are *not* on an island when it comes to your initiative. Thanks to the magical “interwebs,” you can now reach out to others for support. You can find research articles that support the ideas and vision you are trying to share with others. One person you’ll come across quite a bit is Dr. Ruben Puentedura. As I mentioned in a previous

Focus on the Learning and the Students

Throughout the process of cultivating shared ownership, there will be times when the device will become the focus. While the device is a major part of the learning and teaching taking place in your building, remember that the users are still the focus of this initiative. No device magically helps a student learn or purposely steers them to an inappropriate website or app. No device can supply a teacher with instant student feedback without the student interacting with it in some fashion, and no device forces kids to get on social media and become cyberbullies. It's all about how the device is being used.

I mentioned earlier that the student panel revealed that quite a few “non-instructional” apps were being used throughout the school day, and in fact this was encouraged by teachers whenever there was a “free five minutes” at the end of class. As a campus leader, the temptation is to block or restrict every game or “non-approved” app on the device in question. In fact, many districts decide on a particular device because it can offer a strict level of control. However, how are students learning self-discipline and discovery in these districts?

We have restrictions on our devices that keep age-inappropriate apps from being loaded, but this doesn't block broad categories such as “games” from being put on the devices. We have always had the option of pre-loading the devices with some set apps that only we approve and move forward from there, but that comes at a price.

Take, for example, a recent middle school student panel we hosted with some visitors during our iLeap Academy (<http://iLeapAcademy.com>). One of the eighth grade students revealed that he had been using a programming app to code and create his own apps. The app he mentioned appears nowhere on our list of “educationally approved” apps, but it does provide the opportunity to think critically. If we had restricted the apps, he would have never had the opportunity to explore or discover this app, and we would likely have never learned of its existence.

Are Students Constructing Their Own Understanding?

When diving deeper into what students are doing with their devices, it is important to note how much time they spend consuming content versus creating it. One of the first obstacles we encountered with iPads was the presumption that they were primarily e-readers, gaming devices, and places to watch online videos. People viewed the iPads as consumption devices and “digital pacifiers” of sorts, because that’s how they were largely used at home.

That assumption is wrongfully carried over to the classroom, but at times it’s also perpetuated by how the devices are being used for learning. One of the first questions we got from teachers was whether their textbooks would be available on the devices. This is largely to be expected, because we’ve seen with Dr. Puentadura’s SAMR model that users of technology first gravitate toward substitutive tasks. One of the other requests, largely from primary teachers, was to have certain “skill-building” app games put on the devices. Again, like textbooks, these apps fulfill certain roles in the classroom, but they are largely consumptive in nature.

The drawing “At School,” by 19th-century French artist Jean-Marc Côté, actually depicts students plugged into their devices and absorbing content (Figure 7.2). This was his prediction for the classroom of 2000.

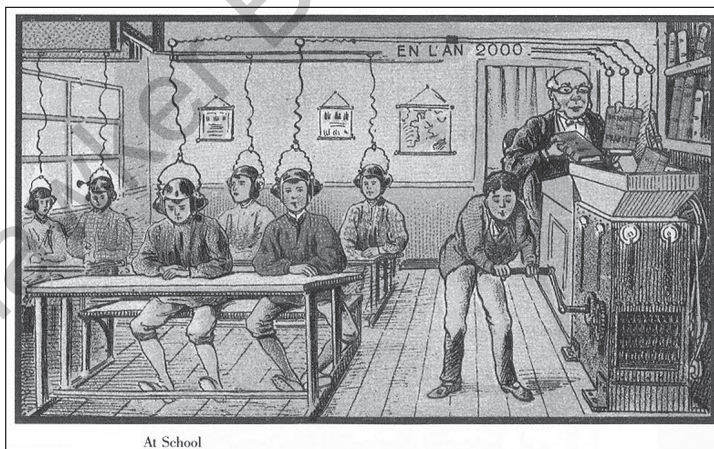


Figure 7.2 Côté’s futuristic drawing titled “At School.”

part of the modern classroom. Lessons were not about exploring all the things you could do with a pencil; lessons focused on ways to use a pencil effectively for teaching and learning. Mobile device usage in the classroom is much the same.

Sharing Your Vision and Reflections

Sharing your vision and thoughts about what worked and what didn't is a pivotal part of good modeling. Capturing the reflections of parents, students, and teachers is important, but don't neglect your voice as campus leader.

Creating a blog may seem like a daunting task for a principal with a full plate; however, posting some short comments on social media or posting a few photos on Instagram that show what you've observed is a quick and easy way to communicate to all stakeholders. Showing others what learning looks like in this new mobile age will not only help you reflect, but also give your community a snapshot of the learning that is happening on your campus.

Tim Lauer (<http://instagram.com/timlauer>) is one of my favorite role models. Tim is the principal of Lewis Elementary in Oregon, and we had the pleasure of bringing him in to speak to our campus leaders about the importance of capturing the essence of learning and then sharing it on social media. Many of his community members as well as people from around the world follow his Instagram account. The combination of our smartphones, which essentially serve as mobile studios, and social media makes it easy for principals to do this.

TECH TIP

Use a tool like IFTTT.com to sync up your accounts. By “building a recipe” that links up your Instagram account and your school Facebook page, you can take a picture and auto-post it to both your Twitter account and your Facebook page with a single click.