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Undoubtedly, we learned an awful lot of valuable lessons as teachers and administrators during the first two years of the program. However, the priority has always been improving teaching and learning for the students. Have we made progress, and how is that measured?

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chapter 1

lessons learned

Starting a 1-to-1 Laptop Program

Best-laid plans aren't necessarily successful plans! Our ambitious 1-to-1 rollout didn't go as smoothly as we'd hoped. Even with lessons learned, we found more surprises and challenges in the second year.

In the 1983 film *War Games*, young David Lightman (played by Matthew Broderick) accidentally links into a top secret, national security-level computer simulation game designed to play out different war scenarios involving the United States and Russia. It all happens innocently enough. Bored in the afternoon after school, David has a friend over, Jennifer (played by Ally Sheedy), and the two of them playfully explore the potentialities of the game. They begin pressing buttons and giggle as different configurations pop up on the screen. Little do they know that they have mistakenly launched the countdown to World War III! On the other side of the computer screen, the national security team scrambles to figure out, in the words of one of them, "What the hell is going on?"

I began the school year at our opening faculty meeting in 2007 by showing a scene from this film. It fit perfectly with the launch of our 1-to-1 laptop program. I cautioned the faculty that we could very well end up looking like the national security team in the film, foolishly trying to keep up with the kids. Little did I know at that moment how clearly this film would resonate for all of us as we began to live out the 1-to-1 laptop program.

One of the primary reasons the school moved to a 1-to-1 laptop program was practical: to alleviate the logjam that had developed over the use of laptop carts. One teacher remembers the days of the laptop carts:

It was a nightmare. There were two carts for the whole building. You had to sign up to use them. The wires were a mess. If you got them after 10:30 in the morning, the computers weren't charged, and there weren't enough outlets in the building to plug the machines in. And, more and more teachers were

The best part about this project was the organic way it developed in the hands of a teacher who listens to her students. As the class brainstormed the beginning stages of the unit, one of the students simply suggested that the class create Facebook pages for the three leaders and be required to chat, post, and debate online. Instead of balking at this potentially outlandish idea, this teacher jumped at the opportunity. This is exactly the kind of collaborative learning that the 21st century demands, but it does mean surrendering a bit of curricular control to the students. For many teachers, letting students “run” the show poses a challenge to the traditional “sage on the stage” model, even in the most progressive of teaching environments. The time has come to share the reins with students.

A September 2009 cover of *The New Yorker* magazine captures the changing roles of students and adults with technology. In the image, a student, no older than 10 or 11, stands at the front of a classroom, writing “text speak” on an old-fashioned chalkboard. Groupings of letters and symbols, such as “G2G,” “BTW,” “<3,” and “BFF” cover the chalkboard. An audience of tuned-out adults sits at their desks, shown side-talking, fully engaged in the kind of distraction many teachers today bemoan in the digital natives’ generation. The message is clear. Kids and adults are speaking different languages when it comes to technology, and kids and adults cannot figure out how to engage each other with technology.



Can you speak their language?

Test your Text Speak.

Can you decode these messages?

LOL • UOK • IDK • OMG • G2G • BTW •
 IMHO • <3 • FWIW • ROFL • BFF • THX •
 F2F • B4N • SOS • 121 • IIRC • l33t

“I totally pwned teh test!!11one!! Can 1 CU F2F B4 PE?”

In this “language,” numbers are often used in place of vowels, so 3s are Es, 4 is a stand-in for “fore,” and common typos are embraced—teh=the, pwned=owned, which is slang for bested, as in a game, hacz0r=hacker, 1!=l, one=1=!

*Laugh out loud or lots of love • You okay? • I don't know •
 Oh my gosh • Got to go • By the way • In my humble opinion (never used humbly) • Love/
 friendship (sideways heart) •
 For what it's worth • Rolling on the floor laughing •
 Best friends forever • Thanks • Face to face • Bye for now •
 Standing over shoulder (e.g., parent) • One to one
 (private chat) • If I recall/remember correctly •
 Leet/Elite*

“I totally owned (bested, beat) the test!!!!!! Can I see you face to face before PE?”

The parent learns that the child is being cyberbullied by a classmate on Facebook. Should the parent contact the school?

Yes. Schools want to know when cyberbullying happens, even if it occurs after school hours and at home. The aftereffects of these incidents can often spread through school the next day and affect the emotional safety of a child. How should parents engage their children with Facebook? One successful way is to become a friend on their Facebook page. But this can be problematic, as *Washington Post* reporter Ruth Marcus explains:

Parents friending their own children is seen as a particularly unnatural act. As my daughter explained, perfectly pleasantly, “There are things that I talk about with my friends that I don’t need you to know.” (April 1, 2009)

So, if a child resists friending, parents can ask an uncle or aunt or close relative or family friend to friend the child. I am a friend of my 16-year-old nephew because my sister does not want to be his friend on Facebook. I periodically check in on his Facebook page to see if the content being posted is appropriate. During the summer between his sophomore and junior years, while he was away for a week with two of his friends, I noticed a spike in activity on his Facebook wall, and some of the comments being posted were not appropriate. I wrote to him immediately and asked him to take down the posts. He apologized and took them down right away. There also needs to be an adult presence close by in the event a cyberbullying incident takes place. And the child needs to know that adults are available to help.

However, some parents view overinvolvement as problematic. One parent explains:

Among adults, there is a collective naiveté about how technology evolves in the youth culture. It is hubris to think that our command of the ever-changing communication landscape is in any meaningful way superior to theirs even at this tender age. History has repeatedly proven us wrong in this regard. Better to teach underlying human values of self-restraint and responsibility towards others than try to close a barn door long left open by the evolving Facebook world.

Schools across the country are wrestling with how and whether to handle student life on Facebook. One school administrator captures the tension:

The issue of having to deal with Facebook and discipline seems to be coming up more frequently. In particular, the challenge that I find is determining what falls under the school’s purview, i.e., where do we draw the line between what is the parent’s responsibility and what is the school’s responsibility? I would love to know if any of you have any guidelines or policies that deal with this matter.

It is tricky business. Students rightly demand to know how it is the school’s business to get involved in what they are doing on Facebook. Where schools do get into trouble is by poking around in student Facebook pages.