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Eric Sheninger:

“Why are we using technology to improve learning outcomes? How are we doing it and what is the evidence that it’s actually led to an improvement?”

Vicki Davis:

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VICKI: Happy Thought Leader Thursday, remarkable educators. Today we’re talking to Eric Sheninger [@E_Sheninger](#) about digital pedagogy. Okay, Eric, what are your thoughts?

ERIC: Oh my goodness, Vicki, I’ve got so many thoughts. But I think the main point is look in the concept of efficacy. Is the intended result showing an actual improvement in learner outcomes? And as we think about all the technology that now at our fingertips whether it’d be web-based tools, virtual reality, augmented reality, virtual learning, blended learning, personalization. Sometimes there’s a tendency to lose focus on why are we using technology to improve learning outcomes? Who are we doing it and what is the evidence that it’s actually led to an improvement?

So, as we look at digital pedagogy and we look at the integration of tools – you know, it’s not about using tools for kids to just tell us what they know. How are we integrating tools with purpose so that kids can actually show us what they understand which I think is the big shift that we need to be focusing on as we begin to become more and more reliant on technology to support an enhanced learning.

VICKI: Eric, you’ve used an important word here, evidence. Used to – you could just say, “Oh, look at the cool gadget” and that was like “evidence” enough but we’re actually having to show the students are learning. How do we do that?

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ERIC: Sometimes, Vicki, evidence is just that kids are engaged. But let’s be honest, just because kids are engaged doesn’t necessarily equate to the fact that they’re actually learning. And as we think about evidence, the biggest shift that has to happen is are our assessments changing? And if our assessments are changing, what is the type of feedback that we’re giving out students are aligned to the standards, are aligned to conceptual mastery. And I think when we start looking at changes, it doesn’t have to be data.

Data is great, data is probably the most convincing form of evidence for our stakeholders. And you’re not going to have that always initially. But you can look at data also, not just in a form of standardized test scores, but we can look at perception data. Do our kids actually appreciate the learning culture in our schools?

What do our stakeholders think? But beyond data, we can look at everything from the observation and evaluation process. Or we getting in class is enough and are we getting that feedback that we need as educators to improve? Is practice actually changing?

Evidence in the form of teacher portfolios, student portfolios. And I also think evidence in the form or artifacts which are detailed lesson plans, assessments, student work, all to show that, yes, teaching, learning and leadership are changing but more importantly that kids are learning in different ways that can still be aligned to the outcomes that we're held accountable for.

VICKI: And you've talked about something – assessment has to change and we have to get to more authentic assessment. I guess the tough thing is, for example, if you take portfolios, we know that portfolios within a school are a great way to really see what students are learning. *(Editor's Note: Listen to <http://www.coolcatteacher.com/creating-elementary-portfolios-with-seesaw/>)* But it's notoriously difficult to actually compare portfolios between schools.

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So where you get in trouble in, "Okay, it's almost like an in-school tool that you can use." But those people who want to say, "Okay, the school around the corner is better than the school over here." They don't really understand or have a way to quantify that, do they?

ERIC: No. And I think that sometimes we think small but we've got to think big. And we think about a portfolio, think about everything that kids post now online. When you're using digital tools with purpose, with intentionality, they in a sense are creating a portfolio of their work, whether it'd be a blog, Instagram, using Google Sites and I can even go on and on about all the different tools. I think the challenges to break down out silos as educators and think about all the variety of ways that kids are showing mastery that are leveraging their passion, their creativity to create these artefacts and examples of just how many different and exciting ways that they're learning.

And I think if we become more strategic on building better assessments, aligning to standards, having sounds outcomes that really demands that evidence and then sharing it across different mediums. I think that really helps to motivate others to begin to take a critical lens to their pedagogical techniques to ensure that digital isn't just an add-on, that it really is a means to enhance.

VICKI: Okay. So put on your practical principle hat and pretend like you were back at a school for the next year, let's just pretend. What would this look like because these are all great things but sometimes principals and teachers say, "Well, I've got the practical every day. I've got to meet these standards and we've got to pass this test. What does this look like in a school if you could create it today?"

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ERIC: [Number one – about curriculum and standards.] Curriculum ensures scope in sequence, shows what the expectations are for the kids, what you have to teach. It doesn't tell you how to actually go about teaching it. And I think that curriculum is one of the most overuse excuses not to change. Same thing with standards. All you have to do is unpack our standards and make those a learner outcomes. A standard doesn't tell you and direct you to how you have to have kids show mastery of that standard. So I think unpacking the standards – and as we think about what are those outcomes, how can we take that work and show alignment to the curriculum, to the standards that can give so many schools that are doing incredible work with technology that has the same challenges, the same roadblocks but they're finding ways to overcome them.

So I think as we begin to curate more of our work and become more transparent. If we don't know what's going on in the classrooms next to us, if we don't know what's going on in the classrooms around our whole building, how can we actually improve what we do? So being transparent, sharing our assessments, sharing specific rubrics, sharing those examples of student work can be the greatest motivator to take a hard look at our professional practice and improve.

VICKI: Okay. So as we finish up, let's talk to the teacher who kind of feels – some times in my career I felt like I was an island. Not right now, but there have been times. To that teacher who feels like they're an island and they're like, "Okay, I get this, I want to actually use digital pedagogy to actually improve learning outcomes." What can one teacher do?

ERIC: Well, I could say one teacher can do more than those with position, titles and power because leadership is about action. And when we think about our position, we think about what that one teacher can do, change is a lonely place. Nobody likes to change but success breeds success.

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And if that one teacher can show efficacy in how they're using an array of digital tools when appropriate to get better outcomes and they can show transparently the process, the methodology and the results, that will motivate other teachers more than mandates, directives, looking for buy-in. Teachers should never underestimate the power that they have and the work that they do with their kids, not only does it matter, but when it's successful, when it unleashes their passions, when we starts seeing evidence of results that becomes a catalyst for change that turns into a tsunami that can begin the process of transforming teaching, learning and ultimate leadership as well.

VICKI: So remarkable teachers, you've heard so many great things to think about on this Thought Leader Thursday from Eric Sheninger. Check the show notes so you can get information on Eric and how to reach out to him and talk and extend this conversation on Twitter.

But I just want to encourage you, teachers, for all of us to go to the next level – and I really that’s what Eric is talking about – is moving to the next level with our digital pedagogy. We really can’t just say it’s about using the new shiny thing, it’s using the new thing or using the old thing to accomplish something and improve learning and that’s what we’re all about. We’re about improving learning and exciting those kids about learning. Thank you so much for listening and get out there and be remarkable.

We’re hosting a giveaway contest for Eric Sheninger’s book *Digital Leadership*. (See <https://gleam.io/cbPs5/digital-leadership-by-eric-sheninger>) So head over to coolcatteacher.com/podcast and enter to win.

Thank you for listening to the Ten-minute Teacher Podcast. You can download the show notes and see the archive at coolcatteacher.com/podcast. Never stop learning.

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