Eight NEW ATTRIBUTES *of* MODERN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

Eight attributes effective leaders must now develop to best serve teachers and students in the Modern Learning world

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THE EIGHT NEW ATTRIBUTES OF MODERN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

A new breed of educational leader is emerging from all parts of the globe. It's a leader that fully understands the fundamental challenges to traditional teaching and learning that the new interconnected, networked world is creating. It's a leader that also sees the amazing opportunities that abundant access to information, people, and technologies is bringing to all of our learning lives. And it's a leader who is helping to create a new vision for her schools, changing thinking and practice in profound new ways to serve the dramatically different learning future that her students are stepping into.

In short, it's a different breed of leader for a different age.

In this whitepaper, we look at the eight new attributes that effective leaders must now develop to best serve teachers and students in the Modern Learning world (as we've defined it here.) While many of these characteristics are now required for leaders in every field, we cover a number that are unique to education. While some have always been important to effective leadership, we discuss how these now have been enhanced and must be rethought for modern contexts.

Eight new attributes that effective leaders must now develop to best serve teachers and students in the Modern Learning world

The eight attributes of modern educational leaders are:

1. They are connected to and engaged in online networks.
2. They are makers with (and without) technology.
3. They are innovators and support innovation.
4. They are models for learning both online and off.
5. They see curriculum as strategy.
6. They facilitate an "ever-evolving" vision for teaching and learning in their schools, with (or without) technology.
7. They are literate in modern contexts.
8. They know "learning is the work."

None of these are necessarily easy to achieve, especially for those who are products of and are currently working in traditional learning institutions. By and large, schools do not operate along these lines, focused instead on delivering an age-old curriculum geared toward age-old outcomes measured by age-old assessments in a deeply standardized way. But modern leaders, those who recognize the sea changes that are underway, understand that age-old practices must now change in fundamental ways. These attributes are places to start.

ATTRIBUTE #1: MODERN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS ARE CONNECTED TO AND ENGAGED IN ONLINE NETWORKS.

THE SHIFT: The best, most current, most relevant ideas for teaching and learning today are no longer in books and magazines; they're online in blogs, Twitter streams, YouTube videos and more.

If you want to get a sense of the latest thinking about education from some of the most inspiring and effective modern educational leaders in the world right now, don't click on over to Amazon.com to find them. Instead, read their blogs and their Twitter streams, or watch the YouTube videos they're sharing of the work going on in their schools. People like Justin Tarte, the director of curriculum and support in the Union (MO) Schools, or Principal Jessica Johnson at the Dodgeland (WI) Elementary School. Chris Kennedy, the superintendent of schools for the West Vancouver, British Columbia district, or Darcy Moore, a deputy principal for the New South Wales, Australia department of education. They are just a few of thousands of administrators from all parts of the globe that are sharing and connecting online, waiting for you to join in the fun.

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Why connect online with other educators who share your interests or passions? Because, in short, these networks and communities in which we participate on the Web are powerful places to learn, and they represent in some form the future of learning for our students. The Web has narrowed the relevance and usefulness of physical space learning if for no other reason that our passions may be shared by a few face to face but by thousands online. That's not to say face to face learning isn't important and useful; it is. But it's hard to argue that online networks aren't more fertile grounds for finding and reflecting on ideas and experiences that can deeply move and inform our practice. In short, networks are the new classrooms.

> **The Web has narrowed the relevance and usefulness of physical space learning**

The important questions that we need to answer to make sense of the modern learning world are being asked and, importantly, answered in these online spaces. While they may feel overwhelming and somewhat disconnected, this is the reality of the new learning world. Connecting is a literacy now, one that leaders must experience for themselves in order to fully understand the consequences for their students.

ATTRIBUTE #2: MODERN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS ARE MAKERS WITH (AND WITHOUT) TECHNOLOGY.

THE SHIFT: The new, technology rich world demands creation as well as consumption.

MIT is looking for students who are "makers." If you're not familiar with that term, it's one that's gaining increasing scale and popularity as both kids and adults use computers and technology to create interesting, beautiful, meaningful work that lives in the world and in some way changes the world. But makers don't just create; in the process, they problem solve, iterate, cooperate and collaborate with others. They learn about learning. That's why when MIT announced that it was adding a separate section for "maker kids" to its student application, it said:

> " MIT wants to attract students who are already solving problems and building, playing and creating, engaging in projects they love doing.

Today's modern leaders are doing the same, solving problems, "creating [and] engaging in projects they love doing." Like Pam Moran, the superintendent of schools in Albemarle, VA, who is solving the problem of standardization by creating "Maker Spaces" in her schools and encouraging teachers and students to make using computers, 3-D printers, cardboard, wood...whatever materials they need that can be provided. As Pam writes, this is not as an add-on to the "real" work. It is the work.

> " Because of our work to bend curricula, instruction and assessment away from the standardization movement and toward the maker movement, I am particularly interested in the impact of making as a pathway to learning – a pathway along which children and teens pursue interests, engage their hands and minds, find passions, empower themselves and others, and discover a sense of personal learning agency.

In a world where standardized work and processes are quickly being overwhelmed by technology, the power of making is self-evident. It requires curiosity, creativity, persistence, and much more that's required to live in the modern world.

ATTRIBUTE #3: MODERN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS ARE INNOVATORS AND SUPPORT INNOVATION.

THE SHIFT: As the speed and scale of change increases, those who stand pat or shift incrementally get left behind. (See Kodak.)

> **"I expect your classrooms to be places of innovation and experimentation, and I trust you to fail well and learn from those failures."**

Each year, Dobbs Ferry (NY) Schools Superintendent Lisa Brady starts with this exhortation to her teachers. "I expect your classrooms to be places of innovation and experimentation, and I trust you to fail well and learn from those failures." She knows, as do many other modern leaders, that classroom practice and curriculum can no longer be about getting incrementally better. Now, classrooms have to look and act and feel different.

What does that innovation look like? Simply, it's anything that transfers agency to learners in ways that reflect the opportunities of this abundant moment. Instead of answers, it's about students' questions. Instead of bubble sheet tests, it's students' in depth reflections on their own learning, or projects and artifacts that have a real purpose in the world. Innovation can be as simple as being less helpful to students when they're confronted with a difficult problem to solve. In other words, you don't need technology to innovate.

But when a teacher and his students have technology and access in hand, the possibilities for innovation are amplified. And, by the way, the potential for innovation goes far beyond just "flipping" the classroom, which in our minds is just a fairly small tweak in the current practice of delivering the traditional curriculum. Instead, innovation with technology may mean allowing students to connect with other learners from around the world who share a particular interest or passion. Or, it may mean constructing an answer to a real world problem that matters to the student. Or, it may mean giving students the freedom and time to create (make) something that only computers can facilitate, something that the student actually cares about making.

Modern leaders understand that these types of new practices and thinking are essential to moving schools and classrooms to a more relevant place in students' lives. They bring a desire for innovative thinking and solutions to every school problem or decision. At the very least, they are willing to poke the box if not get outside of the box entirely.

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ATTRIBUTE #4: MODERN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS ARE MODELS OF LEARNING BOTH ONLINE AND OFF.

THE SHIFT: As we move to different ways of learning online, transparency and sharing of practice become vehicles of teaching and learning.

Ask yourself this: "How do the constituents in my community, the teachers, students, parents, administrative team and others, how would they define me as a learner?" For most educational leaders, this is a difficult question to answer. Most are seen as leaders or educators or even teachers. But few are looked at as deep, continual learners about the things they have a passion for in their lives.

Creating cultures of learning in schools starts with the leaders in those schools acting as learners first and foremost. That means more than just talking about the latest conference or workshop, or the latest class at the local (or online) university. Instead, it means constantly articulating and sharing personal questions that you're interested in answering, and then sharing your process for answering those questions transparently as well. That may mean reflecting on a blog post or a Twitter stream, or reflecting on your own learning process at a staff meeting or via an e-mail.

Modern leaders are designers of their own learning, and they share both the process and the result with the people around them. Importantly, they expect others to do the same.

ATTRIBUTE #5: MODERN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS SEE CURRICULUM AS STRATEGY, NOT CONTENT.

THE SHIFT: When close to the sum of human knowledge is online, curriculum is no longer a deliverable. It's now a select tool to boost personal learning of students and teachers.

The reality of the past meant that for many decades, educators pre-determined the knowledge they judged as being worthwhile. This predetermination was a compromise. Some stuff was put in, other stuff left out, but in the pre-digital world there was little choice. You had around 1,000 hours per year to do your best to 'cover' the curriculum you were given. Curriculum writers around the world would do their best to guess what knowledge would be of most benefit to their students, and they designed the curriculum accordingly.

This thinking is obsolete; it has no place in the technology-rich lives of our students who are today challenging the very foundations on which our schools have been built. Our kids are looking for relevance, authenticity, and collegiality embedded in everything they learn, and if it isn't offered within their school, they simply look elsewhere.

Modern leaders think of their curriculum as a means to an end, rather than the end itself. It's about the questions that matter to young people, not the answers that don't, and it's about essential or powerful ideas, rather than the distracting focus of high-stakes tests. In that narrative, curriculum is selected to meet students' needs at the moment, not delivered in a "just in case" way whether they need it or not.

This then is now made possible in a digitally-rich, highly connected world which in turn requires a math teacher to enable her students to 'think mathematically', not complete tedious 'hand-calculated arithmetic'. It says to a history teacher, "don't teach your students about history, but rather allow them to be historians." And it says to a science teacher that his goal is to imbue his students with a passion for scientific discovery, rather than simply retell the science that is already known.

> **it takes away the security blanket of a content focused curriculum and replaces it with the rigor of one that is built on empowering strategic outcomes**

Above all, this a leadership attribute about lifting expectations of both teachers and students because it takes away the security blanket of a content focused curriculum and replaces it with the rigor of one that is built on empowering strategic outcomes. No longer will the modern educational leader see traditional rote knowledge as acceptable, nor will she believe that the limited expectations we had of our pre-digital curriculum are in any way appropriate today.

As we move forward, young people will only benefit from a view of curriculum that is agile and iterative. It is a perspective that sees curriculum not weighed down by insecurity, but rather inspired by possibility.

ATTRIBUTE #6: MODERN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS FACILITATE AN "EVER-EVOLVING" VISION FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THEIR SCHOOLS, WITH OR WITHOUT TECHNOLOGY.

The shift: The "three-year technology plan" is obsolete in a world where new technologies and affordances for learning occur every day.

If you think your school's vision for teaching and learning is up to date, consider the following: Recently, an app hit the iTunes store that can take a picture of a skin mole and diagnose, within 85% accuracy, whether or not skin cancer is present. (That's about as good as the trained eye of a doctor.) In another development, 3-D printers are now printing food. And in just a few years, over 9 billion devices will be sending and receiving information via the Internet.

The world is changing rapidly and radically when it comes to the new affordances for learning and knowing with new technologies that are introduced every day. If your vision for how we prepare students for such a complex, uncertain world isn't changing rapidly and, some would argue, radically as well, why not?

In the words of Esme Capp, the principal of the Princes Hill Primary School outside Melbourne, Australia, a school's vision for teaching and learning is an "ever-evolving" thing, not a board approved, multi-year plan. The literacies, dispositions, and knowledge base required to be successful in all areas of life need to be revisited on a yearly basis at minimum. And, importantly, that ongoing revisitation must include students, teachers, parents, community members and any other constituents in the school community. Watch our Masterclass with Esme here. (EML subscribers only.)

ATTRIBUTE #7: MODERN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS ARE LITERATE IN MODERN CONTEXTS.

The shift: In the self-organized world, literacy is learning to leverage direct access to publishers and readers.

Used to be that when we read a book or a newspaper, we knew there had been an editor in the process. Used to be that when we created a text, our potential audience was fairly limited. Increasingly today, neither of those are true. We can publish directly to our audience, and we can read directly from the author. That the middleman is exiting from the publishing process is a very big deal indeed when it comes to the way we think about literacy.
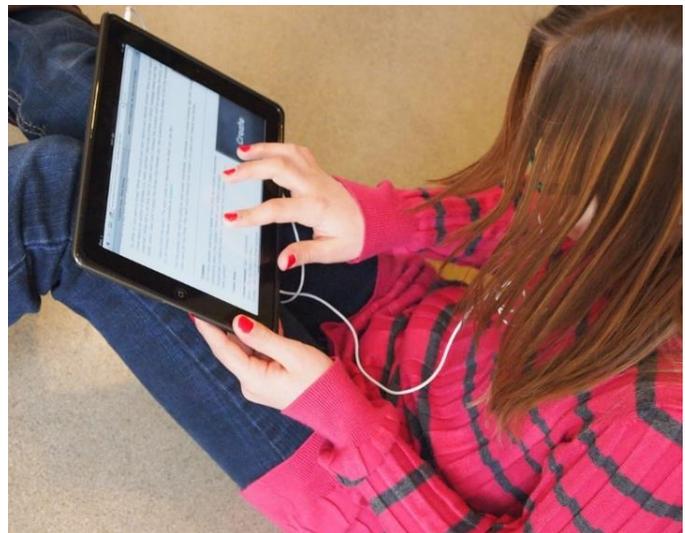
In the United States, the group leading the way in redefining literacy is the National Council Teachers of English. Two years ago, it published a six bullet-point definition of literate readers and writers in the 21st Century, and these apply to leaders as much if not more than anyone else. Literate leaders need to:

- Develop proficiency and fluency with the tools of technology
- Build intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others so to pose and solve problems collaboratively and strengthen independent thought
- Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes
- Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information
- Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts
- Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments

In short, leaders must be publishers to "global communities" with technology, and they must have a heightened "crap detector"

These are challenging for most educators let alone those in leadership positions. But few can argue that these are not requirements for successfully navigating a more technology rich world where self-publishing is becoming more the norm. (For a more complete breakdown of these literacies, see NCTE's full framework. In the accompanying questions, we could easily substitute the word "leaders" for the word "students." I.e., "Do leaders use technology as a tool for communication, research, and creation of new works?")

In short, leaders must be publishers to "global communities" with technology, and they must have a heightened "crap detector" to make sense of the reams of non-traditionally published materials they (and their students) are now consuming online.

ATTRIBUTE #8: MODERN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS KNOW "LEARNING IS THE WORK."

The shift: In an abundant and fast changing world, staying current with the latest news, trends and practices is the most important part of leadership.

Author, blogger, and learning consultant Harold Jarche writes that in this new abundant, much more complex world, "Work is learning, and learning is the work." Why?

> " Because the nature of work is changing. For example, automation is replacing most routine work. That leaves customized work, which requires initiative, creativity and passion. Valued work, and the environments in which it takes place, is becoming more complex. Professionals today are doing work that cannot be easily standardized.

Similarly, the idea of "professional development" is being turned on its head, quickly moving away from something that is provided by the institution to something that is self-organized in an ongoing way. In an age of abundant access, modern learners and leaders are expected to seek their own answers, update their own skills, and stay abreast of new developments and ideas on their own or in cohorts of their own choosing.

Given that reality, leaders must now develop new cultures of learning where learning is no longer an event as much as it is a way of life for everyone in the system. This isn't easy as traditional expectations for professional learning most often take the form of "sit and git." And no question, there is a balance to be struck between time spent reading and connecting and time spent reflecting and sharing.

SUMMARY

These eight attributes capture the shifting nature of leadership in the connected world. Leadership, especially in education, is now more transparent, more flexible, more creative, and

more innovative than it has been traditionally. And, it's more centered on helping all students become "learning ready" to deal with the new complexities and opportunities that they will face in their fast-changing lives.

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Will Richardson is an internationally recognized speaker and author on educational technology with over 25 years of experience in schools. He holds a degree in journalism from Ohio University, and his articles and essays have appeared in numerous journals and magazines such as Ed Leadership, New York TImes, Education Week, Edutopia and English Journal. He is the author of four books, most recently Why School? How Education Must Change When Information and Learning Are Everywhere, published by TED Books (September 2012,) and he has blogged for over a decade, most recently at willrichardson.com. Over the last seven years he has presented in over a dozen countries to hundreds of thousands of educators at every level.

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