Details

What Leaders Should Know about Remote Learning with Eric Sheninger- 063

In this episode, we'll take a look at a leadership perspective on remote learning. Eric Sheninger, author of Digital Leadership shares recommendations for school leaders tackling the challenges of supporting students, teachers and families, learning and working at home.

Introduction

Hello there! My name is Monica Burns, I'm a former classroom teacher and now I spend my time sharing tips, strategies and activity ideas to make EdTech integration easier in your classroom. You may be familiar with my books, like Tasks Before Apps or my blog ClassTechTips.com. Whether we've met at a conference or special event, you've followed along with my EdTech tips for years, or simply joining in for the first time today, I'm so glad you're here!

In this bite-sized podcast you'll get some quick info and actionable tips to energize and elevate teaching and learning!

You can head to my website classtechtips.com/podcast for all of the show notes. That's where you'll find the transcript for each episode, links to resources, and any of the free downloads I mention.

Promotion/Reminder

This spring I'm featuring more educator interviews. If you missed the interviews from the past few weeks, scroll back wherever you are listening to this podcast. You'll find an interview with Jose Vilson on using Instagram Live, Tanya Avrith and Holly Clark talking about tech-infused classrooms, and Martine Brown sharing coaching strategies. I'd love to hear what you think about this new format! Just send a message to me on social, my username on IG and Twitter is @classtechtips

Today's Intro

This week's podcast is titled: What Leaders Should Know about Remote Learning with Eric Sheninger

I'm excited to welcome Eric Sheninger on the podcast, in a moment you'll hear our conversation about his *recommendations for school leaders tackling the challenges of supporting students, teachers and families, learning and working at home. Eric is a fellow ASCD author, you might have his book co-authored with Tom Murray Learning Transformed, or the second-edition of his best-selling book, Digital Leadership: Changing Paradigms for Changing Times*. Let's jump into the interview!

Episode Transcript

Monica:

Eric, thank you so much for being on the podcast today. I know I shared a little bit about your work with my listeners leading into this, but I'm hoping you can give a little bit of your background.

Eric:

Great. Well thanks for having Monica. Well, uh, my name is Eric Sheninger. I'm an associate partner with the international center for leadership and education. And prior to this I was a principal in new Milford, New Jersey and um, my school was able to do some pretty amazing things, uh, many, many years ago. So now I work with schools, districts, organizations across the globe on transforming teaching, learning and leadership.

Monica:

Fantastic. And you know, this has been such a, a wild time, you know, in terms of the positioning and the pivots people are making in terms of supporting students who are now learning at home. And you've shared a lot in the past on digital leadership. I have one of your books right here next to me on my desk as we're talking, and I know that you've been sharing more recently some considerations for leaders. And that's what I'm really hoping we can talk a bit about today, about what leaders should know about remote learning and what kind of things they should take in mind. So now, what are some of those things that leaders should really know about remote learning and the digital component of course, but also how that goes into relationships and connecting with families. What are some of those big considerations you're sharing with people?

Eric:

Yeah, you know, I think when, when we look at remote learning, we have to understand that it is not business as usual that will set us up for success. So the one thing that I think we've learned the hard way is we were kind of caught with our pants down. You know, we really didn't have a, a, a realistic plan to deal with a pandemic. And we're learning lessons on the go. You know, I kinda wrote this little quote a few weeks back that, you know, educators are building the plane and flying it at the same time and they're doing an admirable job, which is true, but, but I think one of the glaring lessons that, uh, leaders in particularly I've learned is just because you have devices doesn't mean that you were set up for success in a remote

learning world. And the schools that have really been able to, uh, more or less, uh, thrive in a remote learning world.

Eric:

They're the ones that really had the pedagogy down in their brick and mortar, uh, buildings that really exemplified, uh, personalized learning. You know, focusing on elements of voice and choice, path, pace and place. Because that's what we're seeing now, Monica, we are seeing personalization. You know, I watched my own two kids, you know, they're able to go at their own pace. They're able to follow their own paths, they're thriving. And a lot of it has to do with the cultures of learning that they were immersed in. So I think, I hope that leaders have understood that, you know what? Yeah, we're trying to figure it out now. We're in uncharted waters. But the whole idea is how do we make sure that we're assigning a manageable workload to our kids? How do we ensure that the planning process for remote learning involves not just teachers, not just administrators, but kids in parents.

Eric:

How do we make sure that we're not putting too much responsibility on parents because they're working at home? One of the biggest glaring issues that has really smacked us in the face is equity. You know, we are seeing immense inequities, um, not just across zip codes, but also just access to technology. And I think for leaders to is you have to be constantly be flexible, understand that there's no one right way to facilitate remote learning. And in many cases it's about looking at what's that right blend of digital and non-digital, uh, just because of that equity issue. So there's a lot of things here that we have to look at it leadership. But the flexibility on behalf of leaders and being able to support teachers, uh, to help them be successful are imperative right now.

Monica:

Yeah, it's so important. And what you mentioned about the foundation, I love what you said about it's not just, you know, the digital component of having the devices, right? That doesn't mean that you can automatically transfer, right? The fact that you have those physical things or that you're able to distribute them. But if you have that foundation in terms of your school or district culture, if you have thought about what's the best practices in general, what does good planning look like? And good communication, right? Those are the systems you can lean into, even if maybe some of the technology pieces are still being worked out in terms of what's a good fit. So when it comes to being flexible and adaptable in these moments, what are some things that maybe you've seen or that you would recommend a school leader to think about in terms of that family communication or connecting with families?

Eric:

Yeah. You know what, when I really think about the, uh, the flexibility component, uh, I really comes down to empathy and really exemplifying empathetic leadership. And you know, it's important for leaders, whether you're a teacher leader, building leader, a district leader, to put yourself in the shoes of your kids. You know, it's about finding the right balance, giving teachers the autonomy, uh, to find the right balance between synchronous and asynchronous instruction. You know, synchronous live using things like zoom, Google Hangouts, blue jeans and asynchronous, which really is what affords those elements of personalization, path, pace, place, voice and choice. You know, it's about not locking everyone into a one size fits all plan, you know. So what leaders have to really do is, you know, reflect on what's working, adapt, listen to concerns, and most importantly, do what's due, what's in the best interest of the kids that they serve.

Eric:

When we think about connecting with families, you know, I wrote in digital leadership, you know, you will not find an effective communicator, an effective leader who is not an effective communicator. You know, in times of crisis, we have to excessively communicate using a multifaceted approach that, uh, blends traditional and nontraditional means, you know, meeting our stakeholders where they're at. Yes, we can use tools like Snapchat, Instagram, even TikTok to get to our younger learners and our millennials. But thinking about using tools like Twitter, LinkedIn, but also, Hey, not banking that everyone's going to be digital. You know, what a lot of successful schools are doing is phone calls. I got phone calls from my kids, teachers here in Texas, phone calls, emails, uh, paper letters, all that has value in today's world because the only thing that matters is that the stakeholders get the right information at the right time, through the right means.

Monica:

And that really comes back to that idea of empathy, right? And putting yourself in someone else's shoes. And I think one of the big things that's come out of this, especially as a shifts were taking place. You know, I'm based right outside of New York city. I taught in New York city DOE for a number of years and, and you know this just as well as anyone, right? Who's in the education space. I found that I had family members or friends, you know, reaching out and not really understanding about how food service works within a school. And how disruptive it is when you do not have school in terms of making sure everyone is well fed. Right. And, and things like that, you know, go on to a whole nother level of understanding of where people are at and reaching them where they are. Especially as families might move around right now or not have school as the number one priority. Not because they don't value education but because they are, have, you know, health and economic issues that

they're dealing with as a family. And so I really appreciate what you said about the flexibility and the empathy and I think that comes back to really being realistic in terms of what kids can accomplish and what families can do to support them. So what are some things that you're finding that school leaders are doing maybe a really good job at or are starting to grow in when it comes to that being realistic terms of scheduling

Eric:

and self paced learning and the asynchronous component you mentioned? Yes. And I think you, I've heard this many, many times Maslow's before blooms, you know, really focusing on the physical, social, emotional needs of our kids first because that's all that matters. And Maslow's hierarchy is really the foundation from forming relationships with you, which you mentioned before, Monica. You know, everything comes down to relationships without trust and empathy. There is no relationship and if there's no relationship, no real learning will occur. So as we think about, you know, putting that in place, another thing you touched on is the whole social emotional learning component. You know, the SEL right now, you know, kids are so distraught because humans are just naturally social and right now kids, their whole lifeline has been disrupted. You know, the way that they communicate, collaborate, engage in discourse with their friends.

Eric:

And a lot of it is, you know, for the schools that are in districts that are really getting remote learning, right? They are finding, they're working with parents and kids to find that balance between SEL basic needs and learning. And the key is, is you know, incorporating elements of, you know, some schools they're, they're incorporating mindfulness lessons, you know, into the day they are incorporating movement. You know, even me in my work when I'm working with teachers, I'm modeling that every 20 minutes I'm having them virtually go on and do a GoNoodle and rock out. You know, I'm thinking about creating balanced schedules. You know, a lot of it is how we engage with our parents. Cause here's the deal we're seeing. There was an article in the wall street journal just the other day. Schools and States are giving up on remote learning because it's too tough.

Eric:

It's too tough because of approaching it with a business as usual mindset. And the whole idea is it's not about piling on more. It's about how do we find that right balance. You know, here, you know, we think about realistic, you know, one of the biggest things that's coming up is grading. And um, many people are on the fence. A grading can work in a remote learning world if it is fair, if it is realistic and if it is equitable. So as we think about that, you know, what I've seen with my own two kids

here in our district in Texas is they have a series of assignments. They're not all graded. The kids get to choose which one will be graded. So there is that choice that is that fairness. It's realistic. You know, the expectations are clearly articulated. They have enough time, they can still do redos and retakes.
Eric:

So you know, when we think about, you know, the role of leaders, you know, you hit the nail on the head, again with that word realistic, what might be realistic in district a or state a might not be realistic and state B. So the key is, is to gather as much information to get a lay in a land, to communicate with our stakeholders, to engage our kids and to create a model of remote learning that actually focuses not on conformity and compliance, but progression towards standard attainment and actual construction of new knowledge. Basically get kids to keep learning.
Monica:

Yeah, and I, I really liked that idea of things being adaptable, right? Being realistic, seeing what's going to be the right fit for this group of students, for this individual students, and really being reflective. And you know, I had a webinar that I hosted a couple of weeks ago and was sharing, you know, the strategy of reflection, right? And one of my suggestions, and I'm not a big journaler so, and I acknowledged this while I was talking to the group. I said, you know, I'm not someone who sits down at the end of the day and typically journals about my day. I think that's great for people who have that routine. I said, but I'm still saying it to folks. Like it doesn't have to be a real journal, but if you take a few moments in your planner to jot down what went really well or what was really hard about the process that you're going through right now, I think there's a lot of benefits to gathering all this information and data, just like you mentioned.
Eric:

Yeah. You know, and I think when you saw the reflection piece, you know, it's so important in a remote learning world that kids can not articulate what they learned, but why am I learning this and how will I use it outside of school? You know, now more than ever, there has to be that connection to relevance. That meaning that purpose. Because if there is no purpose, kids aren't going to be engaged in no matter what the activity is.
Monica:

Right. And I, you know, when kids are not next to that person who's right next to you, right, who's sitting in their classroom, that teacher's not kind of circulating and adapting in the moment, right? That relevancy of their work is so crucial just in order to keep them focused and caring right about these things when there's not someone maybe next to them who has a high energy to kind of get them to that place. Um,

like it might happen in a classroom. And I'm wondering if you are kind of hearing things or you know, things come up in your conversation. You know, I've talked to folks who are sharing about their own children or children in their classes who are saying that some of them are doing a really good job and are Knight and are like really happy in this space that they can focus a little bit more.
Monica:

Things have slowed down a little bit and they're adapting pretty well to this work from home. Obviously, you know, there's extremes with all this, but I'm curious because I've heard some people say and you know from a leadership standpoint, how could a school leader really prepare for families coming back and saying, you know, I don't know if this traditional schooling is the best fit for my child or maybe I want to try homeschooling for the first half of the school year. Are you hearing those kinds of things or do you have any advice for school leaders who might start to hear something like that from their families?
Eric:

Yeah. What I'm hearing is more general is that expectations of parents are changing, their expectations for school are changing. They now are well aware of the potential advantages that a remote learning world has shown it. Especially when you, you look at the, the freedom, the flexibility, um, and the lack of stress, uh, in involved with pedagogically sound, the blended learning. And you know, I believe that parents are, I don't know if they're going to make the shift to homeschooling cause we've seen so many articles where parents, this is hard work, be a teacher, they're going to homeschool. But I do think that they're going to hold administrators, schools, and teachers more accountable for providing more relevant, realistic learning opportunities that are going to, uh, sort of, uh, carry forward. The, the many, uh, benefits that we've seen, uh, especially with pacing and going out, going on their own path.
Eric:

You know, when we think about differentiation, so, you know, my, my hope is that leaders are going to be very thoughtful about what their reentry plan is going to look like, that they're going to work over the summer and really focus their professional learning on their reentry plan. And one of that is going to be that parent outreach and education and you know, building them into uh, the process to create a culture that, you know, not only compares us for the next pandemic but creates a system of learning that is more reflective of the world that we're living in now. You know, we want kids to be able to think, we want kids to a, be able to apply their thinking. What we've learned now, the biggest lesson is we can ill afford to pair kids for something. We need to prepare kids for anything. That's what covid 19 has taught us. That's the

lesson we weren't prepared for anything. Now we are going through the triage, we're doing the best job as so many admirable examples going on, but we can't go back to the way that we've always done it. We have to learn from these lessons and be more proactive than reactive. And I think that's going to be one of the demands of parents.

Monica:

Yeah. And I'd love that you know,

Eric:

the wording you use with just making sure that we're proactive, right? Because being reactive is easy in the sense that you have no choice, right? You have to react to something. But when we know better, right, we can really do better and we have that responsibility to do better. And so just to kind of wrap up our conversation on, on this piece here about you know, what leaders should know about remote learning and kind of the things that they should, should think about moving forward. You've shared so much when it comes to connecting with families, making sure that we're being realistic and flexible and just the importance of those kind of open lines of communication. I'm wondering as we are, you know, preparing for some unknowns of the summer and then unknowns of the fall. Maybe what's one or two big things kind of at the top of your list that are, you're suggesting the school leaders to kind of stay on the lookout for or be mindful of kind of in this second wave of planning now that there's a little bit more context, they can kind of see what might be coming in the future.

Eric:

What are one or two things that you're hoping they'll really narrow in and focus on? Well, I'm probably just going to give one big one and that is to refocus and re envision their professional learning for themselves and for their teachers. You know, when we think about what this has taught us, it's taught us that we have to create the conditions for teachers and administrators that are reflective of the environments that our kids will learn in. When we think about personalized learning, blended learning, remote learning, SEL equity, you know, these are the things, Monica, that do not get enough emphasis. You know, in our world we always hear about the tech. We always hear about the tool. Now is the time where, I'm not saying that's not important, but that focus has to be on outcomes. That focus has to be on how do we fundamentally change pedagogy?

Eric:

How do we have, you know, ensure more impactful instruction? How do we ensure that our leadership creates relevant cultures of learning? So my hope is that now, you know, leaders will really begin to zero in on their professional learning. They'll

focus more on ongoing job, embedded professional learning under the same conditions that kids will learn in, you know, move away from the drive by wanting done that has little to no impact based on research and provide teachers with support but also to get their own support. You know, it all comes down to you know, a word that we've thrown around in this conversation. Feedback, you know, feedback and support. That's what I hope we take from this because the same concepts now that we are grappling with can be applied during snow days, other natural disaster days, another pandemic. But also how about better meeting the needs of all of our kids because a one size fits all approach that's employed by many schools does not meet the needs of all of our kids. So professional learning first and foremost, but also let's think about how we can change a culture that becomes truly more student centric.

Monica:

Well. Thank you so much, Eric, for sharing all of this today, and I want to make sure everyone knows how to stay connected to use a, where's the best place for them to find you or to follow you.

Eric:

Yeah. Um, my website is a one stop shop, Eric schellinger.com, but I'm also easily accessible on Twitter, uh, E underscore Schellinger or just do a simple Google search. I'm not hard to find.

Monica:

Well, thank you so much for joining today.

It was so wonderful to hear Eric's perspective! He shared lots of actionable information, but let's break it down like we do at the end of each episode...

So let's make this EdTech easy...

1. Take stock in how things are going right now
2. Determine if there is space to be more empathetic and realistic
3. Review how you are currently connecting with families
4. Reflect and prioritize your next steps

Find links to the resources Eric mentioned in the show notes for this episode, the

link is right in the description wherever you are listening to this podcast, or you can head over to classtechtips.com/podcast to find it too.

Promotion/Reminder

Outro

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Episode Resources

- This podcast was transcribed with Rev, use my affiliate link to try it out: try.rev.com/Cz82B
- Eric Sheninger's Website
- Eric Sheninger's Twitter
- Eric Sheninger's Books, Articles & Blog
- ASCD: Professional Learning & Community for Educators
- *Digital Leadership: Changing Paradigms for Changing Times* (Eric Sheninger's New Book)
- International Center for Leadership in Education

- Zoom (Video Conferencing tool)
- GoNoodle (Movement and Mindfulness Tool)
- Google Hangouts
- TikTok
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