

Professional Networks: Never Obsolete

I started to title this column “What Is Voxer?” to address what my professional learning network (PLN) has been describing as *the* tool for principals. But fear of highlighting what might end up a fleeting fad stopped me in my tracks. Isn’t this what school leaders continuously contend with: striking the balance between staying on the cutting edge of innovation and avoiding platforms that will soon become obsolete?

The theme articles in this issue of *Principal* magazine underscore that personal networks are what will continue to thrive and drive the innovation that produced group voice-messaging platforms like Voxer, and what will generate the next “next big thing.” When principals are connected to a PLN, they are never alone in vetting new ideas, tools, platforms, and initiatives. Together, networks can navigate what is a good use of time versus what is a waste of time. In this way, PLNs are never obsolete.

What is more, PLNs can help busy school leaders correct course. The articles in this issue all describe a constant narrative: lack of resources and time leads to investing in an innovation solution. But as with any implementation, technology integration is not always a straight shot. Thus, schools frequently start out on a technology journey, with best intentions, and then must adjust the effort. In this era of fast-paced change, tapping into a PLN can be a crucial time saver.

What’s Old Is New

My PLN has taught me that sometimes innovation involves reviving an old model. Take, for example, “#B@CKCH@NNELEdu,” a weekly, scenario-based podcast that features real educational leadership scenarios. The podcast is produced by the Mid-Career Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education (PennGSE). According to PennGSE’s, Joe Mazza, who serves as leadership innovation manager, the program is based off of the popularity of the podcast “Serial.”

Mazza, who urges educators to consider what they can learn from the resurgence of podcasts and the global popularity of “Serial,” explains, “There are some windows of opportunities for educator and leader development with the rise of mobile technologies. Professional development has received a major shot in the arm with the #EdCamp movement, which has put the ownership of professional development and learning directly on the shoulders of all educators in a relationship-based, informal, and fun way.”

But it’s not just about the platform. According to Mazza, “Innovation can’t be a thing we check off, but rather a mindset that keeps our ears to the ground listening, learning, and responding to the needs of students, staff, our community, and the collective education field.”

Mazza will be leading discussions on these topics and others at the #NAESP15 Innovations Lab at the Best Practices for Better Schools Annual Conference in Long Beach, California, this July. I know I’ll be there, connecting with my PLN, trying to find out what’s new. Will you? 



My PLN suggested apps and tools that will help you implement the ideas presented in this issue’s articles. Look for their Tech Tool recommendations, and make sure to add them to your own PLN.

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Printed in the USA by RR Donnelley.
Art Direction: David Vogin, McMURRY/TMG, LLC
Cover: malija/Thinkstock; milindri/Thinkstock

—Kaylen Tucker, Ph.D.