If a person is really afraid of making a misstep, set up a buddy system with another teacher or staff member to review his or her online contributions. Have the buddy look at the person's tweets, blog posts, and other contributions for a few weeks and give feedback on tone and content. At the same time, have the person critique the feeds of other users in a dialogue about appropriate professional content. These small interactions will build the confidence needed to work without a net.

Closing In on the Finish Line

Whatever path you take toward bringing the tools and the access for networked learning to your students, know this: the path will be filled with turns and forks and potholes. It may seem at times as if nothing is changing, everyone is upset, and none of the technology or ideas will work. We know it's easy to say, but trust the process. In *The Six Secrets of Change*, Michael Fullan points out that organizations going through a change experience an "implementation dip," a time when the behaviors change but the beliefs don't (Fullan, 2008). Often it feels like things are getting worse, not better. In order for the change to succeed, you will need to weather the storm of this turbulent time and come out on the other side.

Remember, your community will need to travel through the transformation stages that we outlined in chapters 2, 3, and 4 for students to fully reap the rewards. Be patient, and keep in mind that there really is no other alternative. Our students need to learn in networks, and therefore, we do, too. It doesn't matter how long it takes. Every movement forward is one more step on the path to the future. That's what really matters.

THE FUTURE OF SCHOOLING

Throughout this book, our aim has been to describe the transformative power of networked learning and to give you the practical strategies you need to begin a meaningful process of change for your schools and, more importantly, for yourselves. We know we haven't answered every question or dealt with every possible scenario of change. Every school will travel down this path in a different way. We do hope, however, you feel you have a solid foundation for beginning the important and difficult work of rethinking learning for our students. We also hope we've motivated you to act sooner rather than later. If you're feeling challenged, maybe a bit scared, but in general excited about the prospects, we've done our job.

We don't blame you if you're squinting a bit in trying to see where all of this ends up. As we've pointed out, the rise of the web only dates back to 1995 or so, and the rise of learning networks is even shorter. So much has become possible for our learning in such a short period of time that one can't help but wonder at the startling implications as we stare five, ten, or twenty years down the road. Learning on the web is in its infancy. Trying to envision its effect on schools a couple of decades from now is like trying to predict the Internet a few moments after the first telephone call. But some trends are emerging, and we'd like to take these last few pages to discuss what those larger themes might be.

Perhaps the easiest one to see on the horizon is the continued explosion of mobile computing. It is not a stretch to say that in as little as ten years, every student will have a personal Internet-enabled device available to them constantly as part of their educational experience, and some would say that's a pretty conservative estimate. We've said this before—by itself, that device doesn't do much. What really counts is the power to plug into networks for learning under the guidance of a teacher who knows how to do that. But access is a start. When every student is connected, things start to get interesting. As Clay Shirky wrote in his book *Here Comes Everybody*, "tools don't get socially interesting until they get technologically boring . . . It's when a technology becomes normal, then ubiquitous, and finally so pervasive as to be invisible, that the really profound changes happen" (2008). We said it before: buckle up. The real shifts haven't yet started.

Ubiquitous access via mobile devices will create schools in which students reach out to teachers from around the world to build networks for their own learning as they routinely take notes in a notebook. They won't

do this as something novel or new, but as a central methodology in their learning. Right now, most students still think about learning as local, as something that happens when they are in school with access to textbooks and instructions from a teacher. In the future, when they are sitting at the center of a web of connections that never shuts down, learning will seem more fluid, more constant, and less constrained, and their teachers will seem like the most important part of understanding how to leverage the power of this network.

That will require an evolution in the role of the teacher—from a content specialist who dispenses knowledge as a commodity to a classroom facilitator who helps students grow the skills for their own learning. Once again, this is not a new goal for educators, but it is newly possible when content is more easily accessible and lifelong learning begins to evolve into a set of skills for reaching outside the four walls of the classroom. Teachers will have a broader, more interdisciplinary role that looks more like the discovery mode now appearing in the classrooms of teachers like Clarence Fisher, Anne Smith, Brian Crosby, Shelley Wright, and Shannon Miller and in entire schools like Hunterdon Central and Science Leadership Academy. It's nearly impossible for one teacher to go deep with thirty students, but it is possible for one teacher to help students go deep using dozens of other teachers.

One of the things that will make this depth possible is the continued ability to personalize learning for our students. Individualization of content and instruction is a lofty goal that stretches back to John Dewey and beyond, but the technological explosion puts it more in reach than at any other time. In the same way that people dreamed about going into space for hundreds of years before the science made it possible, teachers have dreamed about students learning at their own pace within learning paths customized for them. Now, for the first time, the web enables them to break the gravity of mass instruction. In the not-too-distant future, the web will be able to deliver content around our interests and needs before we even ask for it. If there is a tangible threat to education as we know it, it may be the many businesses that are beginning to create ways to help us learn without school. One of our greatest fears, in fact, is that those with the means to do so will opt out of schools in favor of services that can provide more customized, passion-based learning paths for kids.

Either way, the days of the static paper textbook are numbered as each student will soon access dynamic content in real time, often in immersive environments of virtual reality. Simulations have enormous potential to change how we think of learning, particularly when they are web enabled and involve thousands of people from around the world. We're not talking about World of Warcraft, but rather things like World Without Oil, a massive simulation that took place online with people from all continents as a learning exercise to predict the results of a worldwide oil shortage. Closer to home, students can explore potential career paths through simulations that allow them to be a lawyer or doctor for a day. All of these simulations use the power of games to engage students in a learning dynamic that provides just enough challenge to encourage growth and mastery.

These changes will cause a huge premium to be put on teachers as learners. In the future, teachers' networks will actively inform every instructional decision every day. Transparent sharing of content and instruction will mean that teachers can dip into a torrent of connections to grab the strategies they need in their classrooms. A continuous global dialogue of teachers will ensure that the best methods for supporting teaching and learning are freely available, along with the evidence of their effectiveness.

Taken together, we hope that by 2020 schools will have evolved into real centers of learning, the most important node in a student's expanding learning network. We can imagine schools as places where younger students are steeped in exploration, problem solving, performance, art, and collaboration, and where older students are given the license to own their learning, pursue their passions, and become expert learners under the watchful eye of mentor teacher-learners. We can imagine the end of age groupings, of distinct disciplines, and to some extent, the current school calendar and schedule as we begin to think about our learning as something we carry with us constantly. Schools become places where teachers help students manage these networks, where students build capacity and create meaningful, beautiful work that is shared with the world on a regular basis. They become places where children are in the presence of caring, nurturing adults who guide them and push them to be the best learners and human beings they can possibly be by leveraging the power of connections.

No doubt, our kids will still share deep and rich learning experiences with other children and adults in their local communities, experience the profound benefits of working with others side by side to create meaningful and excellent work, perform for local audiences, and know the pride and satisfaction that comes with it. Our schools will play an important role in making all of that happen, but they will also be places that push our kids out into this new virtual space in equally profound ways, making sure every child has the opportunity to learn deeply and experience the beauty and the complexity of the world in which we live.

We'll finish with this: regardless of where we and our children find ourselves in twenty years, we hope that educators have been the driving force of whatever changes we've made. For that vision of a better, more relevant, more engaging education to be realized for our children, each one of us must make a commitment to change, to learn, and to expand our own conception of what teaching and learning and schooling looks like.

It is an amazing time to be a learner. For our kids' sakes, seize the moment; start your own journey. Lead. Our sincere best wishes along the way.

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