
Book Review
Who Owns the Learning:
Preparing Students for Success in the Digital Age
by Alan November

Reviewed by Khalid Burgess
Texas Tech University

Who Owns the Learning: Preparing Students for Success in the Digital Age is a teacher's journey and revelation of how technology can be used to enable students to take charge of their learning. It provides real life examples which are effective, relevant, and, most of all, tested and proven. The author, Alan November, is a retired oceanography teacher who taught in Boston. He was also a computer coordinator, technology consultant, and a cofounder of the Stanford Institute for Educational Leadership Through Technology.

The book is refreshing, enlightening, and it is a gem for all teachers, administrators, and lovers of education and technology. The case studies and examples that are provided throughout the book include websites, QR codes, and many other resources for the reader to research to see the truth behind the studies. The examples provided in the book are relevant, applicable to all students, and do not call for the use of numerous resources.

The book begins with November, in the role of a director of an alternate high school, being summoned to deal with Gary, a student who broke into the school. After confronting the student and finding out the reason behind his action, November discovers that Gary broke in the computer lab to finish writing his computer program. Amazed and shocked, November sits down with the student and discusses his motivation, drive, and boldness to commit such an act. November, although not pleased with Gary's actions, is intrigued by him and does not punish him; he is more interested in Gary's fervor for technology. What's even

more puzzling is that summer vacation had commenced and this student, Gary, is one who has poor grades and an awful attendance record. After speaking with Gary about his passion for computers, November becomes intrigued by the power of student motivation and the impact of technology on learning. It leads him to creating a computer class that focuses on problem-solving. November (2012) believes “that given the right opportunity, tools, and teacher guidance, students want an equal voice in directing their own learning” (p.7). November supports his belief by presenting case studies in which teachers have used technology to make students take control of their learning. He calls it the “Digital Learning Farm.”

In the first example provided, the book takes the reader to Santa Monica, California, where middle school math teacher Eric Marcos and his students create mathematics tutorials and make podcasts. The students are dedicated and motivated. They are so committed that once when a student’s parent came to pick her up, she told her mother to come back later because she was not finished making the podcast. The parent was shocked. The gadgets and devices utilized to make the podcasts motivate students even more. To see the truth behind the study, I followed the link provided in the book and was led to the podcasts. Some podcasts are conducted by a single student, and some are in pairs.

Another case described in the book is of a high school calculus teacher who chooses one student every day to be the scribe for the class. The scribe’s main job is to take notes which enable one’s classmates to fully focus on the lesson. The teacher then discusses the notes with the student and they make corrections if needed. After the notes are finalized, they are posted on the class blog. This technique uses technology to disseminate information for all. The slow note-takers in the class can relax and focus on the lesson rather than panic about what they might forget to write. Those who are poor note-takers not only improve their skills by being the daily scribe, but also they have the chance to see what good notes look like by viewing the blog.

In the case titled “The Researcher,” the teacher chooses one student a day to sit behind the computer and research all questions posed during the lesson. This learning experience teaches students how to navigate the web, find credible and reliable sources, and how to properly use search engines. Most, if not all, teachers have a computer in the classroom, and this is an excellent teaching and learning strategy that requires minimal resources but results in tremendous benefits. The student behind the computer profits by using technology to improve his or her research skills, and their classmates benefit by having their challenging questions answered on the spot.

All in all, the case studies that November narrates are solid, and the links and resources provided throughout the book support them. November does not provide case studies at the elementary level; however, the case studies designed for middle and high school teachers will most likely be transferable for interested elementary teachers. Any educator, administrator, or researcher in the fields of education and technology can derive great benefit from these on-going successful case studies. All one has to do is follow the link and the truth will reveal itself. The book is relevant and inspirational.

Book under Review

November, A. (2012). *Who owns the learning: Preparing students for success in the digital age*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.