

BOOK REVIEW

Michelle Rogers-Estable, *Book Review Editor*

Ditch that Textbook: Free Your Teaching and Revolutionize Your Classroom, by Matt Miller

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In one word, Matt Miller's *Ditch That Textbook* is pragmatic. To expand that into an alliterated phrase: It's a practical pitch for pedagogy with power.

Matt Miller is a former Indiana high school Spanish teacher, after running a short stint as a newspaper journalist. Today, he is an author, blogger, and speaker. His bio also hits on recent accolades as a Google Certified Innovator, Bammy! Top to Watch in 2016, winner of the WTHI-TV Golden Apple Award, as well as a top ed tech influencer by Onalytica. The text is partly his story of revolutionizing his own instruction, and largely both a plea for change in our practices, and a loose strategy guide for innovation in today's tech-heavy world.

The book's audience is broad. It clearly works for the K–12 educator or ed tech faculty member. As a college faculty member who also keeps a toe in ed tech-focused faculty

development, as I read, I thought, "I bet a lot of my teaching and ed tech colleagues would think this is NOT written to them." And, in the same thought bubble, I would think: "Now how many copies of this can I spread around campus?" Miller writes in a person-to-person style, using short vignettes of his own experiences to make points. This down-to-earth approach has the effect of breaking down potential academic walls of titles and roles. However, for those accustomed to academic tomes, this familiarity may not "work." Third person is not Miller's style, nor is heavily citing research and primary sources.

The book is organized into 38 brief chapters, categorized into four topics: Why Go Digital?; Ditch That Mindset; Ditch That Textbook; Ditch That Curriculum. Underlying each is "plain pedagogy," not technology. This approach is a strength, since one of the main overarching themes of the book gets played

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out in nearly every chapter, namely “The mindset that fuels digital learning is: Good teaching trumps good tools” (Miller, p. 67). Content is grounded in *DITCH*’s acronym:

- D**ifferent ... than what students see daily
- I**nnovative ... drawing on new ideas or modifying others’ ideas
- T**ech-laden ... with the use of digital sites, tools, and devices
- C**reative ... tapping into students’ original ideas as well as your own
- H**ands-on ... encouraging students to make and try things on their own

If you are seeking a “tech” or a “step-by-step” guide, this is not the book for you. This book IS for you if you want to examine your own teaching practices and get sound advice for making the transition away from chapter-by-chapter lynchpins. Miller gives examples of the “why,” as well as multiple “how’s,” without making this a “how-to” book or simplistic recipe. What is well developed is Miller’s unwavering commitment to my own mantra for the book: *Change is tough, but it can be a ticket to major impacts in student learning.*

What is unique? Beyond the convincing personal coach that I feel I have found in this text, it is the extended connection to what is ever-changing ... technology-supported pedagogy and what we do with it. Recognizing that paper copies of anything are old before they hit the marketplace, Miller has embedded QR codes at the end of several chapters. Not that QR codes are “new,” but these links take the

reader to his Ditch That Textbook blog. As a blogger, Miller is masterful featuring best practices, while connecting users to people, places, and things that are current and relevant. For example, Chapter 17’s QR code transports the reader to his blog post, “I Just Can’t Do it All: The Connected Educator Letdown.” We all know that the buzzword “connected” is everywhere, as are multiple Amazon purchases. Between Chapter 17 and his blog post, as a newbie, I would have a starting point. As someone who has too many resources at my fingertips each day, I would equally have grounding and a step.

The proof of the pudding is: Can this book inform your eLearning practice, regardless of how grounded you are in tech and how committed you are to dispensing with your course textbook? My answer is yes, with these considerations:

- Use the text with his blog (<http://ditchthat-textbook.com>), Twitter feed, Google resources, and other components of the “brand.” For example, his blog currently features a freebie link to his eBook, *101 Practical Ways to Ditch that Textbook*. They all work together, you get connected to Miller and educators who are striving to make a difference, and you are not alone.
- Use guidance that Cool Cat Teacher (Vicki Davis) espouses: “Innovate like a turtle.” She adopts one new big digital focus in her teaching each year (<http://www.coolcat-teacher.com/speaking/phm/>).