

CREATING A DIGITAL-AGE LEARNING CULTURE

A digital-age learning culture is a learning culture focused on collaboration and communication. From a transformational leadership perspective, the digital principal is called to create, encourage and sustain a school culture where staff members discuss, observe, critique and plan together. The creation of this collaborative culture is the most important thing the digital principal can do to ensure successful integration of technology for student learning.

A large part of the digital principal's role pertains to providing learners with environments well equipped with technology and resources for learning, all designed to address students' diverse needs. Digital principals strive to ensure that learners gain a relevant education by promoting instructional innovation, modelling effective use of technology, and monitoring how technologies and related practice are infused into the curriculum.

Ensuring Instructional Innovation

Instructional innovation, as undertaken by the digital principal, can range from ensuring the alignment of curriculum, instruction, assessment and technology standards, to monitoring multiple sources of student data to assess how students are using technology to enhance learning. The main focus of a digital principal is continuous improvement of technology-infused learning.

In order to transform the curriculum, through the integration of sound pedagogy with new technologies to improve learning, the digital principal, as an instructional leader, empowers teachers to enact positive change in the classroom. The digital principal facilitates and reinforces the teacher's important work in creating a technology-rich learning environment that invites exploration, collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving, and participation in tasks connected to real-world contexts. Doing so means providing teachers and staff with the most current information and professional development opportunities available about educational technologies and their use in classrooms. One way to do this is to introduce helpful instructional resources, including websites that focus on curriculum, technology and innovative digital tools for the classroom.

Modelling and Promoting Effective Use of Technology

There are several ways to model and promote the frequent and effective use of technology for learning, and to communicate relevant information to your teachers. In today's digital world, all school districts have websites, and most host individual school websites on their servers with varying degrees of autonomy. If you have some autonomy over your school's website, you will be able to post timely and relevant information for your school community. Consider the following options and determine which will work for your school:

- Post links to relevant articles or websites on your school website under a *Resources* tab for parents, teachers and the extended community.
- Create (or have someone create for you) a Twitter feed that can link to your school's website. Use staff meetings, School Council meetings

and online or print newsletters to invite teachers, students, parents and staff to follow you. You can tweet out event reminders, words of praise related to student and school successes, and notices of educational resources that influence your thinking or that might be of interest to your school community.

- For monthly staff meetings, create a *Spotlight on Technology* segment. Take 10 or 15 minutes, and arrange a presentation by someone, who is using a new digital tool in the classroom. To identify potential presenters, informally survey the teaching staff to discover what tools they are successfully using with students, based on tool types or categories — for example, tools for presentation, research, information curation and social networking. For the session, ask the presenters to demonstrate the tool, give an overview of its affordances and constraints, and share how it was used in practice and how the students responded.
- Seek a partnership with a university, and invite university faculty to work in your school to conduct research on digital technologies and their impact on learning. Doing this will provide on-the-job professional development for your teachers.
- Start a *book club* focused on educational technologies. Use the professional learning community you have created to encourage discussion and collaboration. An educational book could be chosen monthly, and interested participants could discuss the implications of the book's contents for their own context and share how to implement the ideas. Interested participants could also view videos, visit websites or read documents linked to your online professional learning community.
- Encourage and support collaboration among your teachers and support staff to enable the study of technology and its infusion across the curriculum.
- Foster the use of social networking among your teachers to expose them to as many new educational ideas and resources as possible. However, note that there are concerns to be addressed. Many school districts are developing policies on how best to use social media sites with students. The Ontario College of Teachers released an advisory on the use of electronic communication and social media for teachers, administrators and other school personnel. Let your teachers know that you trust their professional judgment, while providing them with the appropriate information to help guide their practices. Alternatively, spend 15 to 20 minutes at a staff meeting having your teachers explore the relevant policies and resources.

A transformational leadership approach encourages collaboration and communication among members of your respective professional learning community and fosters the creation of a digital-age learning culture. As a digital principal, one must be active in ensuring that instruction is innovative while still meeting curriculum outcomes and student learning gains. Ideally this includes promoting innovation in instruction and assessment, as well as incorporating technology to enhance learning through modelling the effective use of technology for parents, teachers and students. [CP](#)