



Monograph

Technology in the Classroom: Part 2 – Time theft, social media, BringIT

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This monograph outlines some recent questions and concerns that have arisen from Board Technology programs. Specifically, your Federation has concerns around your privacy, safety and the erosion of your personal time. This is the second part of a 2-part memo. Part 1 is related to privacy and safety.

There is no time

In their “Professional Learning Series” the Board has offered training on Twitter and iPads. However, the training is scheduled largely after school hours. This limits the ability of all members to access the training and, in a time of scarce jobs, puts pressure on newer members. All Professional Learning should be delivered through the school day with release or on a PA day.

Many of the technologies pushed by the Ministry and the Board have the potential to erode more of your personal and professional time. A few years ago, teachers were asked to step up for the volunteer position of Learning and Technology teacher to provide free support that should be paid work by the IT department. More recently, teachers were asked to participate in a pilot project for Brightspace – another private company (D2L) app – which promises to help parents “better engage with their learner’s classroom and maintain awareness of their progress and upcoming work”. Teachers must spend time outside of class being trained to possibly set the expectation that a teacher’s work must be online. How much extra work is being created? It is endless.

Finally, with more and more technology and no more IT support (or even less), work is being downloaded onto Teachers. Updating software, managing mobile carts, and trouble-shooting student’s computer problems all add to an already huge workload. We must not let our working conditions erode. Don’t fall for the argument that doing extra work, above and beyond all you do as a Teacher, is necessary to achieve what is best for kids. We need to push back and preserve our working conditions so that we really can “be there for the kids”.

Tweet your career away

Teachers have been disciplined for following students and engaging in, seemingly, innocent conversations on social media. Even if you have a classroom Twitter account that your Principal has encouraged, know that it is no different from your personal account. You are responsible for anything on this account. You should not follow students and you should not have conversations with them. You should not post pictures of students. Such things have led to College of Teacher investigations with allegations such as “grooming”.

On one hand the Ontario College of Teachers advises Teachers to embrace technology, including social media, as a way to engage learners, but on the other hand, there is no mercy if a mistake is made in this public forum.

The BringIT bubble burst

Lastly, a caution on bringing your own technology into the classroom. What happens when you 'Bring-IT' and a student tweets or posts from your device? Or visits inappropriate sites? The risks associated with bringing your laptop or other technology into your classroom are not insignificant. Remember that everything that goes through the Board's servers becomes their property. Also, if your device is damaged or stolen, the liability is your own.

Members have unfortunately learned the hard way that the Board is not prepared to assist if the personal technology you bring into the classroom is damaged or destroyed. Similarly, students are becoming increasingly resistant to using their own devices for educational purposes. In some cases, they should be cautious. Unknowingly, they could be compromising their data or clogging up their devices with unwanted apps.

Technology is obviously a powerful teaching tool, having students bring their own also is an issue of equality. There is already enough pressure on students to keep up with their peers. Adding a layer of expectation in the classroom, is very unfair. Because of this, many teachers have come to realize they cannot and should not count on students bringing their own tech. Let's continue to insist on a properly funded education system where all students have essential learning tools provided.

A corporate agenda

As supporters of Public Education we must be cautious about what we bring into our classrooms. Part of this must be in resisting the corporatization of schools by Apple, Google, Desire-2-Learn, Microsoft and others. Often, this corporatization is embedded in language that encourages you to be; "a 21st Century Teacher/Learner" by "transforming your practice" as you "lead with pedagogy and follow with technology".

Unfortunately, much of the education reform today is driven by corporations. The P21 Foundation was started in 2002 by AOL Time Warner Foundation, Apple, Cisco, Dell, Microsoft, the National Education Association (an American education union), the US Department of Education and others. It was this group of partners that brought us "21st Century Skills", also called Global Competencies, Personalized Learning, Blended Learning and the STEM push. They promote these products with their own "research" and peddle them to Ministries of Education. In turn, Ministries have pushed these corporate agendas out to school boards by adopting the language, tools and visions of groups like the P21 Foundation. The Canadian version of this group is the organization Canadians for 21st Century Learning and Innovation (C21). These organizations have very different goals than education for the public good. What is their motive? Education for cheap by replacing Teachers with machines and massive corporate profits. You only need to look to our post-secondary institutions to see it has largely been done. We are on our way to being next.

For further reading please see Tara Ehrcke's excellent article entitled "21st Century Learning Inc" published in Our Schools/Our Selves, Winter 2013.

https://www.academia.edu/3533227/21st_Century_Learning_Inc