

Developing a Virtual Classroom and Workspace through Google Classroom  
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### **Introduction**

How can technology be utilized to enhance student engagement within the limited physical confines and resources found in a traditional classroom? My focus is to find ways to utilize the few mobile and immobile resources that my school has to offer to engage our 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. I will strive to use these resources as a starting point but will incorporate online software and programs to enhance the use of technology in my traditional classroom.

The virtual workspace with which I will primarily be experimenting is Google Classroom. This multifaceted online, free software has many modes through which teachers, students and parents can contribute to and be involved in the learning experience. Google Drive, Google Docs and Google Hangouts are three modes through which students will digitally engage with each other.

In the humanities at the secondary school level, an important core competency is to teach students to become active and socially responsible citizens. We teach them skills to become successful in the workforce and promote civic participation so they can become active in the democratic process of our country. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as students have become fully immersed in the virtual world, it is imperative that we educate our students about digital citizenship.

Over the course of my study, I will develop a policy outlining the rules, guidelines and nature of consent for the appropriate and responsible use of Google Classroom. My students will play an integral role in my research, as they will apply their 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills such as critical thinking, collaboration and digital literacy to aid in the development of a digital citizenship policy.

### **Inquiry Questions**

How can technology be utilized to enhance student engagement within the limited physical confines and resources found in a traditional classroom? How can Google Classroom and digital learning enhance student engagement? Can a district-wide policy be developed for the Vancouver School Board for the use of Google Classroom? What are the legal barriers from various stakeholders?

### **Inquiry purpose**

As British Columbia transitions to a new curriculum that involves a paradigm shift to student-centered learning, new resources will inevitably be required to meet the standards and expectations of the new curricular content and big ideas. It is going to be difficult to meet these new expectations while considering the lack of funding in a district that is already strapped for resources. In order to negate these barriers, I feel that it is imperative to search for a virtual workspace that includes the following elements: accessible, online, safe, meets district guidelines, contains a platform to provide digital resources, and contains an element for students, teachers and parents to communicate and engage with one another and course materials. Google Classroom is a great online platform for digital learning that meets the aforementioned needs of an effective virtual classroom.

Within Google Classroom, I will use Drive, Docs and Hangouts as platforms in which my students will work in groups, share research, access curricular resources, and create a forum for teacher, student and parental communication. I will initially

implement Google Classroom in my Social Studies 11 classes and then work my way down to my grade 10 and 8 students. Assignments will range from research and current events projects to every day lesson plan activities.

In addition to learning how to use Google Classroom, students will need to acquire knowledge on how to effectively, safely, responsibly and respectfully navigate the world of digital learning. They will need to develop a skillset to be able to assess situations online and react appropriately using their sound judgment. I believe that we can achieve this imperative and urgent task by developing one single, consistent appropriate use and digital citizenship policy for using Google Classroom and virtual workspaces in general. Since technology is always changing, students should be given the skillset to safely navigate the unpredictable and ever-changing digital world.

Through focus groups, surveys and interviews, my research will be compiled from the participation of students, teachers, administrators, the Ministry of Education and BCTF representatives responsible for the research and technology division. I will be focusing on the Vancouver School District but will also utilize policies and parameters that have already been completed in neighbouring districts.

The Vancouver School District will be able to use my research to help educate teachers on creating viable virtual workspaces and to train students on responsible digital citizenship. On a smaller scale, I hope to achieve departmental and then school-wide approval. I also plan on taking my research to the BCTF and school board members to see if it can be implemented in the district. Through creating an online classroom and discussion forum, I hope to bridge the gap between parents, teachers and students by providing a platform for parents to have more accessibility and engagement in their children's day-to-day learning. My students will be my primary focus group, as I will be working with them throughout my two-year framework for this research project.

### **Key concepts**

#### **Digital citizenship and literacy**

This can be defined as the application of ethical standards and respectful etiquette to the appropriate and responsible use of the Internet and the digital world at large. Developing an awareness of the risks and responsibilities that come with online use need to be clarified and then taught to our students. They need to acquire knowledge on how to assess online situations and react appropriately using their sound judgment. Students will work towards actively engaging in a productive and respectful manner while creating an atmosphere of collaboration and support. Since technology is always changing, students will be provided with the skillset needed to deal with the unpredictable future of the digital world.

Digital Literacy can be defined as the “ability to understand, evaluate, create, and integrate information in multiple digital formats via the computer and Internet” (AASL, 2009, p.240). A lack of resources and in many cases the immobility factor of being able to transport class sets of textbooks and technology outside the confines of the physical classroom should not hinder teaching and learning opportunities for teachers and students alike. Digital learning allows students to communicate through a multifaceted medium in which they can understand, critically think, create and explore course content and beyond.

### **Virtual classroom**

Learning that can take place both inside and outside the classroom and be accessible by the entire class 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in the virtual realm is an invaluable tool that educators must utilize to engage our 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. When learners engage in cycles of creation and consumption as part of the participatory Web culture, they are simultaneously developing online identities or dynamic and shifting constructions and presentation of self (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008). Students that are anxious or nervous to speak in class, often find that the online world is an easier and safer setting to share their feelings and thoughts. The ways in which students receive and interact with course material, their peers and classroom community is a very important facet of the education process. Engagement is a complex process that characterizes the interaction between the learner and the system (O'Brien, 2008).

The important transition to the Web 2.0 era, is that students can now be active participants rather than passive recipients. To create their own links, resources and connections enhances student engagement. With the fluidity of an online space, the learning experiences and possibilities are limitless and therefore encourage student-centered learning and exploration.

### **Policy**

The Vancouver School District lacks a district-wide legal framework that outlines and regulates the software that a teacher may use to create an online classroom. Consistent appropriate use policies and digital citizenship education are also severely lacking. I will examine the various policies that schools within the district have already enacted in regards to Google Classroom. In addition, I will also research school districts in British Columbia that have district-wide policies for the use of Google Classroom and other virtual classrooms. It is my goal to create a succinct policy that I can use for my classroom, school and perhaps district.

### **Ethical considerations**

Following ethical principles is of the utmost importance since the foundation of my research itself is to formulate an ethical appropriate use and digital education policy. Protecting the privacy of the youth involved in my research will be of the utmost importance. If adults such as teachers or administrators would like to remain anonymous, that privilege will be awarded to them.

Parental and student consent will both be mandatory for student participation. Student participation will be voluntary and they will be forewarned of the material that will be discussed. Both parents and students need to know that there will be discussion of sensitive subject material such as sexual harassment, rape, and suicide.

Another ethical situation that may arise is the confession to illegal or unlawful actions by participants. This may become a problem when discussing sensitive material and the legal framework surrounding inappropriate online behavior. I will have to research privacy policies and the rules surrounding the responsibility to report illegal activities.

Lastly, I will have to take low functional learners and English as a second language students into account when distributing surveys and analyzing my results. I will have to modify my research methods to these different types of adapted learners during my inquiry and observe if this has had any impact on the final results after my

inquiry. It will be interesting to explore if language or learning barriers have an influence on the way in which these students use technology.

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