

Use of Electronic Technology in the Classroom

Electronic technology is increasingly being incorporated into classroom instruction and in how educators communicate with and interact with students and with their caregivers.

Electronic technology used properly and safely, can enhance student learning and engagement and can aid in efficient and effective communication with students, as well as with their parents and/or guardians. Used improperly or with insufficient safeguards, your conduct using electronic technology can become the subject of complaints by students, parents or administrators. Inappropriate and/or misconstrued comments or postings by you can lead to findings of professional misconduct and discipline at your board and/or at your professional College.

Electronic Technology

Many school boards offer students and staff accounts with third party applications, such as Google, and encourage the integration of these platforms in your classroom. Students can use these electronic platforms to access assignments and other class related information, to work collaboratively with other students and to submit homework. These platforms can support group and individual communication. These are just some of the possible applications of these platforms.

The Ministry of Education supports various forms of e-learning, including what it refers to as "blended learning", which it describes as using "the tools of the provincial learning management system (LMS) to teach and support learning in a face-to-face class" (edu.gov.on.ca/elearning/blend.html).

Included in the Ministry's suite of online secure tools are the following:

- Blog
- Calendar
- Checklist
- Content
- Discussions
- Dropbox
- Email
- ePortfolio
- Grades
- Journal
- Locker
- News
- Pager
- Progress
- Quizzes
- Survey

Things to Consider

The use of electronic technology or "blended learning" is now a well established part of our education system, and educators should be aware of their related professional obligations and responsibilities and the risks that could ensue if they fail to meet them.

The use of electronic technology creates records that can be saved, distributed and in some cases falsified and/or manipulated. It allows comments, information and images to be posted and exchanged between educators and their students, and beyond, raising potential privacy issues, not to mention concerns that may arise from the nature of the communication or images, whether it originates from you as in your role as the educator or from your students.

Use only board provided or approved electronic platforms. While there are many electronic platforms available, you should confine your use to platforms that are made available by or approved by your board. When in doubt, check with your administrator before using them. Board approved and/or provided platforms will have certain security and privacy features that may not be sufficiently present with outside platforms. If a failure or security breach arises in board approved or provided platforms due to a flaw in the technology, it will be a board responsibility. If on the other hand you implement a platform or electronic application that is not board provided or approved and it is not secure or is otherwise flawed, then you may find yourself being held personally responsible.

Obtain consent. Your board may have specific policies on obtaining parental consent before giving students access to electronic technology and learning platforms. Be aware of any such requirements and ensure that all of the necessary consents have been obtained. In any event, it is always best to ensure that students' parents/guardians are aware of any electronic platforms or applications that you are using in the classroom, regardless of whether not your board requires specific consent prior to their child using it.

Set clear expectations around the use of any electronic technology that you are using, including the purpose, and ensure that these are communicated to your students and their parents/guardians. It is a good idea to set these expectations out in writing and have both parents/guardians and the students sign off (if they are age appropriate) to acknowledge that they have read and understood the expectations.

Ensure awareness of and compliance with any applicable board policies and/or Codes of Conduct. Board Codes of Conduct should apply to conduct on electronic platforms as well. This means, for example, that any use of the technology as a vehicle for bullying or for other inappropriate purposes, using profanities or making other inappropriate comments or posting inappropriate images, or any other conduct that would violate any applicable board policy or Code of Conduct if done in person, is not permissible in electronic form either and should be dealt with accordingly. Similarly, you should be aware of any policies that your board may have that are specific to the use of its electronic technology and ensure that you, your students and their parents/guardians are aware of and are complying with any such policies.

Retain control of any platforms that you are using. If you are the moderator of an electronic platform being used by your class, keep your login information confidential and ensure that no students have access to it and ensure that they cannot manipulate or change information that you have posted.

Keep your tone and any information posted professional at all times. Maintain a professional tone in all of your communications using electronic technology, whether you are communicating with the entire class, smaller groups of students, individual students and/or their parents. Students communicating using electronic technology may use a casual tone and may attempt to engage in discussions that are not appropriate in nature or outside of the purpose for which the platform is intended. As you would in person, you should never engage in discussions or comments that are inappropriate or that could be construed as being inappropriate, including any sexualized comments or innuendo, or discussions that might otherwise cross professional boundaries.

Beware of using humour. The use of humour with students using electronic technology can be more risky than using it in person. Online you are not able to gauge your students' reactions or comprehension of the fact that you are "joking". Off the cuff comments or comments that you intend to be funny, can be hurtful and damaging to students who misinterpret them and who do not have you in the room with them to explain your true intent. The impact of statements made by you

communicating using electronic technology can be magnified, particularly if shared with a group of students. Remember that your comments can easily be copied and shared with a wider audience and taken out of context, further distorting your original intent in making the comment.

Ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place so that access to the platform is controlled and information is secure. Ensure that appropriate measures are taken to control access to the site so that it is limited to students in your class, or as appropriate, their parents/guardians, and that no one outside of these approved users has access. Avoid breaching any student's confidentiality, for example, by disclosing to others a student's personal or confidential information, such as marks or your feedback on their work. In addition, if you are posting any pictures of classroom activities, ensure that you have parental/guardian permission to include pictures of their children on the site and be mindful about the images you display. For example, consider whether an image might be inappropriate or construed as such, or might be embarrassing to the student or otherwise make them the subject of ridicule by their classmates. Protect posted images so that they cannot be downloaded or copied.

Ensure inclusion. Do not assume that all of your students have home access to the internet services or personal electronic devices that they need to use the electronic platforms that you are using. Depending on the area of the province in which you teach and/or the financial means and/or personal preferences of the families involved, internet access may be limited and/or students may not have their own personal devices, which will limit your students' ability to use this technology. Make sure that you are not setting technology use expectations that exclude any of your students due to access issues.

Finally, when in doubt, consult with PRS for advice!

JM:TS