



Remote Teaching and Learning – A School Leader Perspective

As we enter a whole new environment for schools in Ireland, as school leaders I believe it is so important to support our staff, students and parents in a variety of ways. As a school leader it is important to look forward, look outside to learn and bring this back to our school team. It is also important for school leaders to avail of all the networks of support that exist via the NAPD, school management bodies and PDST especially.

By engaging on twitter over the weekend, it was great that by Saturday night many key twitter in education users in Ireland had agreed that #EdShareIE would be the commonly used hashtag to share resources, supports for teachers in addition to all that already exist via Scoilnet, PDST etc.

(At this point I am presuming that the Ed tech leaders will cover all issues re Teaching & Learning – I shall look at surrounding issues)

Having an understanding and experience of leading change is very important for school leaders as many staff are at various stages of engagement with digital technologies, many may need greater support than others, many too have various home circumstances and we can learn a lot about all of this from other organisations who have already got experience in this area.

Over the weekend I both tweeted and posted on LinkedIn an article from a US teacher based in China, sharing insights and advice from the experience in China who just like us had to learn to adapt together.

Simon Sinek, a global leader on change posted a great video on LinkedIn saying that organisations should do a weekly check-in with staff – Have a Huddle. Getting everyone simply to connect on a personal basis, that this is so important for promoting teamwork and as we move forwards using our school system this is something I wish to do. By linking remotely, this can help to move to a virtual staff room for the down time, to build the ever important relationships. I heard of a staff sending photos to each other last week showing where they were, bits of wellbeing advice etc. Check-ins with staff are very important as our staff adapt to this ‘new working environment’. Schools thrive on teamwork and collaboration, we need this to continue. Teachers are each other’s best resource and support.

We are planning to develop wellbeing resources via a newsletter to students/ parents as this is so important. Students need to engage in physical activity and we intend to build this into homework. Through our Tutor and Year head teams we can continue to support students as we do in school but I am sure new issues shall emerge and together we can seek solutions based on the experience of others.

Our 6th year students in particular articulated their fears about their orals, practicals, exams, getting to College, having the course covered etc. These are real fears throughout the

country and being lived by their parents too as we all look for certainty and answers where they are non yet in this ever changing global crisis.

We as school leaders need to be cognisant of our own contexts, our families that we work with. Some students may have to mind siblings as their parents go out to work. Indeed we sadly know that some parents may not have work as we are hearing of temporary lay-offs etc, a truth that was real for parents I spoke with on Thursday last. Equally healthcare workers with children are worried too, so we as educators can do our bit to support them by ensuring that they know their children have work to do, have their time being filled with activities to do and followed up on, that learning continues and feedback from teachers is effective and develops student skills, understanding and knowledge.

As everyone embraces social distancing, the getting closer in homes can be a new source of stress for many, access to digital technology can be an issue too, the sharing of the computer in the house as parents too may be working from home. Getting the balance on this shall be a new learning for us all. It will be important that students continue to receive the important messages about using social media appropriately.

Students who experience anxiety, mental health difficulties shall not suddenly be fine, these students need supports yet the challenge is to provide this is new ways. How do our Guidance Counsellors and Learning Support teachers provide these supports in an effective way? All new issues to address.

Therefore there are many new challenges for schools to address. There are many new moral/ethical issues? What about the family facing financial difficulties that schools may already support through The School Meals Scheme? I am aware that one of my Deputy Principals has been working on this over the weekend with inter organisational supports being planned and some teachers have volunteered to help if distribution is required. These are all new challenges but with teamwork, creativity, asking questions, sharing solutions, we can all help each other.

These are my thoughts as we begin to adapt focussing on Teaching and Learning and Wellbeing of the school community.

Equally other challenges are emerging for Boards of Management, planning forward, policy development, doing our usual work behind the scenes in schools but one thing I am confident about is that as educators we shall give our best to the students we serve and the school communities we work in.

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