18 Teachers' work with digital technologies

Neil Selwyn and Amanda Heffernan

How to use this policy

Policies relating to the use of digital technologies in school usually address issues including “Appropriate Use”, “E-Safety”, network security, and data protection. However, digital technologies are now an integral part of how teachers are expected to engage with school-related work. While digital technologies can support some teachers in engaging with their school work on a more effective and flexible basis, the same technologies can also impact negatively on the working lives of others.

This policy draws attention to the need for schools to ensure that all teachers work with digital technologies in ways that: (i) enhance the quality of their work *and* (ii) are beneficial to their wellbeing. Digital technology use varies considerably across schools. As such, any policy needs to be co-created on a whole-staff basis and refined to best fit the technological practices of individual schools. Some of these suggestions within this policy are deliberately provocative and intended to start conversations within a school community. If your school rejects the suggestion of banning emails outright, then what restrictions might you want to impose, or do you see the use of email as entirely unproblematic? The policy provides options and guidelines for important considerations for schools to adapt to their own context and digital environment.

[INSERT name of school] Teachers' work with digital technologies

Rationale

Digital technologies impact the working lives of teachers in ways that would have been difficult to anticipate a few years ago. Schools have shifted much of their administration and governance to digital platforms. Planning, assessment and feedback, accountability and reporting, and most formal communications are undertaken via digital methods that are accessible regardless of time and location (Selwyn et al., 2017). Digital technologies have become a key means of informal communication and interaction within every school community (Hutchinson et al., 2020). Digital technologies have enabled the intensification (pace) and extension (into non-working hours) of work, which has detrimental effects on health and wellbeing.

These technologies have also increased the standardisation and automation of teachers' work, from automated feedback and grading tools, through to templated lesson planners and personalised learning systems. While these technologies are a source of support for some teachers (relieving them of repetitive and/or routine tasks), they can also limit teachers' autonomy and professional judgement (Alirezabeigi et al., 2020; Selwyn, 2019).

The rise of personal devices in school and the increasing availability of "free" online resources and apps mean that teachers are now increasingly expected to take responsibility for choosing and adopting digital classroom resources. With teachers finding apps to use in their own classrooms alongside "official" school software, schools no longer have full oversight of the software being used. While apps and platforms can support innovative teaching and learning practice, they also raise a number of risks – from issues of "third party" use of student data, through to inappropriate pedagogical design (e.g., Manolev et al., 2019; Williamson, 2018). Outside of the classroom, digital technologies are implicated in increased expectations of availability through digital communications. Teachers now face a range of online communication concerns, e.g., social media contact with students, online harassment from parents, or simply the impersonal ways that technologies can sometimes be used.

Finally, schools need to be aware of the new form of "digital labour" that teachers are now engaging in through digital technologies. This additional work – often unpaid and usually unnoticed – raises a number of issues for teachers and their employers. Types of work here include the growing trend for online professional development sessions, as well as teachers' voluntary participation in mass online "professional learning networks" and informal teacher communities on social media (see Bergviken Rensfeldt et al., 2018, Carpenter et al., 2019). Some teachers engage in additional social media work by sharing resources and ideas through platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube's "Edu" channel. Such practices can lead to more professionalised forms of online exchange. Commercial platforms allow teachers to sell their self-produced lesson plans, worksheets, and other classroom resources to educators worldwide. These forms of digitally mediated work are undertaken by teachers in addition to their classroom and school-related duties, and can impact on schools in unforeseen ways (Selwyn, 2016).

Purpose

This policy outlines the roles played by school leadership, teachers, and IT staff in supporting teachers' use of digital technology in ways that enhance teachers' capacity to work effectively and safely.

Scope

These guidelines apply to school leadership and all staff at [INSERT name of school]. Importantly, they are guidelines that should be contextualised to meet the

local needs of your school. These guidelines should be developed in the spirit of protecting teachers from detrimental effects and risks of technology uses, while not restricting their freedom to engage with technology in ways that are personally beneficial.

Policy statement

The following policy presents guidelines to guide and inform teachers' choices at **[INSERT name of school]** when working with digital technologies.

The guidelines draw attention to the wider implications of teachers' work with digital technologies and encourage teachers to think about how their work with digital technologies might impact on the school experience of others.

These guidelines will be reviewed regularly and adapted to fit the digital infrastructure of **[INSERT name of school]**.

Best working practices relating to internal school email

[Option 1]

- Ban the use of email altogether

[Option 2]

- We commit to considering the impact of email traffic on staff workloads and commit to minimising unnecessary emails by:
 - Limiting the number of emails that any member of staff (regardless of seniority) can send within any 24-hour period;
 - Banning the CC-ing and BCC-ing of recipients;
 - Banning "Reply All" responses.

[Option 3]

- We commit to considering ways to minimise email traffic within a school. We ask senders to consider questions such as: Who needs to be copied into emails? What emails could be avoided with a quick conversation in person? What *needs* to be recorded via email or other digital platforms for accountability and record keeping purposes?

Best working practices relating to digital communication with students and caregivers

At **[INSERT name of school]** we acknowledge that digital technologies offer opportunities to establish connections **and believe it is crucial that schools support teachers in their daily online interactions with others.**

At **[INSERT name of school]** we encourage online interactions to be approached with the same care given to maintaining respectful relationships

and appropriate interactions offline, while acknowledging that online interactions and relationships are distinctly different.

[INSERT name of school] provides:

- Guidelines and expectations to staff for reasonable response times and communication procedures (e.g., communicate clearly to caregivers that teachers are unlikely to check their email throughout the working day and define an expected response timeline, such as 48 hours).
- Clear procedures for communicating with school communities (e.g., communicating through school email addresses, having a single point of contact for specific issues for students, caregivers, and external stakeholders).
- Codes of conduct when using personal devices and/or personal accounts for school business and vice versa (e.g., not using personal phones to take photos of students for class records; not providing personal email addresses or telephone numbers; providing teachers taking excursions or camps with a school phone so they aren't sharing their personal contact details).

Best working practices relating to learning management systems

[INSERT name of school] commits to:

- Ensuring that all teaching staff (regardless of seniority) have the same system rights, settings, and permissions.
- Ensuring that Learning Management Systems and other schoolwide platforms are configured to inform all users what data is being generated by their use of the system and what is being done with that data.

Shared expectations around overwork

[INSERT name of school] commits to:

- Collectively developing acceptable working guidelines for working with digital technologies to minimise the extension of work into personal hours.
- Considering the possibility of “digital business hours” to be clearly communicated with the school community.
- Encouraging all staff to turn off email and app notifications and scheduling specific usage times instead of feeling required to respond as emails or notifications arise.

Teachers choosing to use new applications and software in their classrooms

[INSERT name of school] commits to:

- Ensuring transparency in what software and apps are being used by staff and supporting teachers in making these decisions.

- Taking care, oversight, and accountability for the procurement of software regardless of cost (ranging from “free” software and apps to large schoolwide systems)
- Developing a “vetting” process for new devices, software, and applications being adopted by teachers. We will consider using principles similar to the data protection impact assessments (DPIA) that the European Union’s General Data Protection Regulation requires of many European organisations. We commit to identifying and analysing how data privacy might be compromised by the adoption of any new piece of digital technology.
- Maintaining an open and up-to-date list of the apps being used throughout the school to:
 - Avoid overlaps and doubling-up;
 - Allow IT staff to offer advice and support;
 - Enable teachers to swap recommendations and concerns.
- Considering including the use of classroom apps or software as part of the school’s professional learning/development – supporting staff to become “more informed, critical consumers” of education apps (ISTE, 2019).

Staff at **[INSERT name of school]** should thoroughly read the Terms of Service for any new app and consider the following questions:

- Did students have to make an account to start using that app? If so, did they have to provide personal information (email, name, age, etc.)?
- Does the app require parental permission? Who has access to the email and other information once students have created that account?
- Does the app developer share user information with others? (This information will be in their privacy policy.)
- Does the app collect additional information such as location or contacts?

Teachers at **[INSERT name of school]** should also ask the following questions regarding the pedagogical implications of the software:

- What models of pedagogy does the software promote?
- What assumptions are made about students and learning?
- What are the software’s core values?
- What does the software allow to happen that could not be done by another existing means?

Teachers engaging in social media as “micro-celebrity” or “teacher influencer”

At **[INSERT name of school]** we understand the importance of protecting student and staff privacy when using social media. As such:

- Staff should maintain care when sharing information or images relating to their classes, being especially aware of identifying students or colleagues.

This includes never posting photos of students on personal social media accounts (even if their caregivers have given permission for the school accounts to post photos) and never providing identifiable details about students in stories or anecdotes.

We also understand the importance of protecting the integrity of our staff, students, and school community. As such:

- Staff should disclose all interests and links established through commercial activities including sponsorship opportunities, corporate affiliations, influential public roles and profiles, and financial incentives for being seen to use a certain product or be aligned with an edu-business due to public profiles on Twitter, Instagram, and other social media platforms.
- Staff should disclose any commercial sponsorship or tacit endorsements – especially if acting as a paid affiliate for a commercial organisation or provider. Any external interests should be declared through formal and appropriate documentation procedures. Teachers should avoid real or perceived conflicts of interests when discussing products and companies in relation to work.

Teachers sharing resources online beyond the school community

Teachers at [INSERT name of school] will be clear about who owns the intellectual property created within a school before making use of platforms such as TeachersPayTeachers, Amazon Marketplace, and Etsy, which allow teachers to sell their self-produced lesson plans, worksheets, and other classroom resources to educators around the world.

Rating of evidence base

Figure 18.1. Teachers’ Use of Digital Technologies Rating of Evidence.

Authorship

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Related policy and documents

[INSERT RELEVANT POLICY AND DOCUMENTS]

Date of ratification

This policy was ratified on the [INSERT DATE].

Date of review

This policy will be reviewed by [INSERT DATE].

Further reading

International Society for Technology in Education [ISTE]. (2019). Better edtech buying for educators: A practical guide. ISTE. [Practical advice and examples to support schools become “more informed, critical consumers of EdTech.”]
Future of Privacy Forum. (2019). *The policymaker's guide to student data privacy*. <http://studentprivacycompass.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/FPF-Policy-makers-Guide-to-Student-Privacy-Final.pdf> [Helping policymakers develop thoughtful approaches to student data privacy: legislation, rules, policies, and technical safeguards that protect student data and can adapt to a quickly evolving technological environment.]

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