Education Discovered

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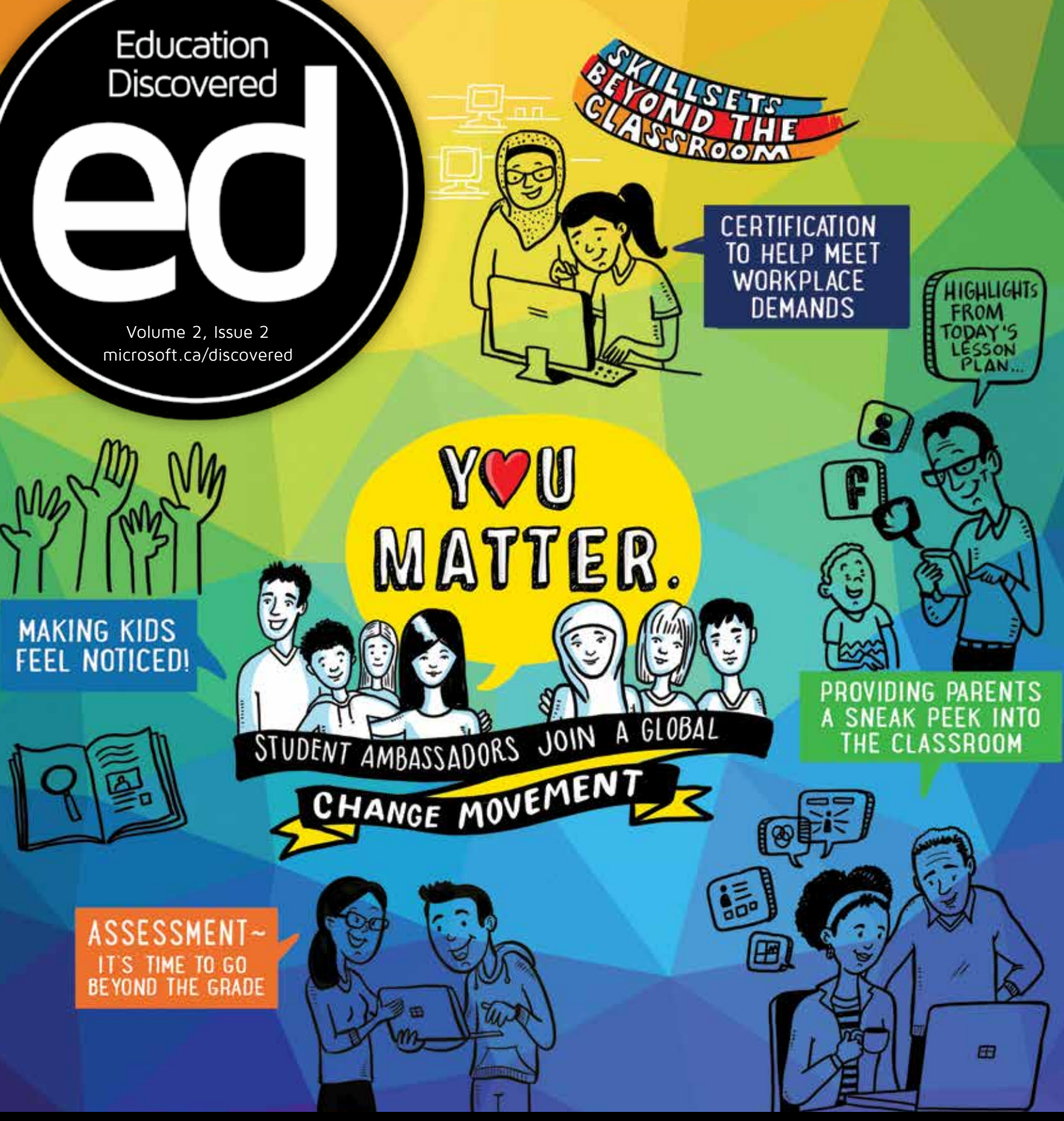

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EDITORIAL

WHO MATTERS? WE ALL DO

When I delivered my TED talk in 2011, I didn't plan to ignite a social movement. Fast-forward five years and I'm struggling to keep up with the most transformative change I've seen in my 28 years in Education. And it all started with two words: *You Matter*.

In the beginning, I thought *Choose2Matter* was going to be a path to helping kids launch innovative solutions to problems through concepts like Genius Hour. What emerged instead is a breathtaking phenomenon.

Yes, I issued a call to action. Yes, I want people to accept that they matter and that their actions count. But I didn't predict student ambassadors would self-select to join a global movement, one that touches every major challenge facing educators today, from dropout-prevention to bullying to generating interest in STEM (see story, pg. 3).

I now know the game-changer for the 21st century is for kids to believe they matter so they can leverage their collective genius to drive change.

I often remind educators: "You won't have a shot at their brains if you don't first secure their hearts." Making kids feel noticed, valued and depended on is as simple as implementing the 2-5-2 rule.

First, greet every student by name as they enter the room and take two minutes to remark on something about several of them. Next, commend at least five students during each class for their contribution to the day's lesson. Lastly, take two minutes at the end of class to reflect on what was learned.

You Matter is not a statement of inspiration. It's not a project, strategy, event or item on the agenda. Mattering *is* the agenda. These two words are changing learning, lives, and the world.

Angela Maiers
Choose2Matter

Angela Maiers is an educator, entrepreneur, disruptor and visionary who has been creating and leading change in education for more than two decades. The Choose2Matter movement arose in response to her You Matter talk at TEDxDesMoines in June 2011. Learn more at choose2matter.org.

Share your thoughts about the articles in this magazine on Twitter: @MicrosoftEduCA.

FOREVER CHANGED IN PRINCE ALBERT

Canadian student ambassadors grab hold of Choose2Matter movement

"My story is about loss, but I have help so I can find joy and not be sad all the time."

The words were softly spoken by a petite 10-year-old girl, yet they commanded the attention of a full auditorium in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, this past spring. Why? Because Gracie, a student in the Saskatchewan Rivers School Division, was the first among more than 400 of her peers to step up to the microphone and answer the question: "What matters most to you and why?"

Gracie was speaking at a *Choose2Matter* LIVE event organized by a group of educators, including Carlton Comprehensive High School principal Dawn Kilmer and teacher Adrienne "Adie" Schenk. Choose2Matter is a global movement sparked by American educator and author Angela Maiers, whose 2011 *You Matter* TEDxDesMoines talk is inspiring people all over the world to lead change. The talk is a call to action that challenges everyone to acknowledge and use the gifts they've been blessed with to make a difference – or, as Maiers says, to tap into their collective genius and give it a reason to show up.

Years earlier, Carlton Comprehensive grabbed hold of *Choose2Matter,* displaying the movement's positive messaging on classroom doors and in hallways. But Schenk knew they were just at the tipping point. "We've woven it into the fabric of who we are in our building. Now we're ready to take it deeper into our student body and out into our community," she says.

Maiers agreed to meet with student leaders on one condition: they had to "pick themselves" to participate and lead change on their own, with no grown-up intervention. An email was sent to all schools, inviting students in grades 5 to 11 to participate in the live event. There was no way to determine how many would show up.

"I didn't know if five or 50 would show up," says Maiers. "But I did know they would be forever changed because somebody in the world was expecting them and inviting them to lead."

Astoundingly, 428 enthusiastic, energetic and excited kids arrived. "It gives me goosebumps just thinking about it again," says Schenk. "The coolest thing was to see the youngest students step up and lead the older students."

Within four hours, the group had identified 27 "heartbreaks" – issues that matter to them – and self-organized to move forward with action. When Gracie courageously stood up to share her heartbreak, that no one should have to grieve alone, it was "like the waters parting," recalls Schenk.

"She lost her dad four years ago in a tragic car accident so it just melted my heart to see her take that risk," she says. "All of a sudden it was this funnel to Gracie. She was a small magnet leading people to make a difference and it was absolutely breathtaking."

Some of the other heartbreaks identified include: concern from students in grades 6-8 that younger students were not playing well together on their school playground; the need to facilitate more random acts of kindness; and, a desire to ensure all students enjoy a positive high school experience. Students are now moving forward with solutions, from small school-based efforts to large community-wide strategies.

Maiers believes what happened in Saskatchewan will fundamentally change the face of the movement. Student ambassadors, once activated and connected, will carry the message forward, she says. "What makes this so different?" poses Maiers. "It's a live movement. It's something that's happening in real time that's ignited inside of people."

Over the summer, some students are working with local media to create a communication platform to widely disseminate the *You Matter* message. A community event is set for October 15, and Schenk is looking forward to even more great activities as her school continues to implement Maiers' new *Liberating Genius* program, including the launch of a Home Room, an opportunity for students to meet one-on-one with teachers for 15 minutes every day.

"As an educator, I'm obligated to teach the curriculum," says Schenk. "Now I get to teach kids that they matter, that they are powerful people, they just need to dig deep and harness their genius. To me, this is what teaching is all about."

Saskatchewan students are finding their wings by choosing to matter. Follow the movement at choose2matter.org to see how others around the world are taking flight too.

LOVE OF LEARNING

Meeting kids where they're at

Photo by: Tara Lafreniere, Archbishop M.C. O'Neill Catholic High School

Regina high school teacher redefines learning

There's always something new to discover. So why not get out there and find it?

That's the motto that inspires Microsoft Innovative Educator Expert (MIEE) and high school teacher Dean Vendramin to try new things at Archbishop M.C. O'Neill Catholic High School in Regina every day. It's also what propels him to consider innovative ways to monitor and assess student progress in a technology-driven world.

In March, Dean joined 240 educators from around the world for the annual Microsoft E2 Educator Exchange in Budapest, Hungary. Here's what he had to say about the experience and how his "affection for technology" continues to shape his career:

ED: What was it like to be surrounded by so many inspiring educators in Budapest?

Dean: It was electric. You don't always find yourself surrounded by people with the same passion for trying new things, so it's easy to feel like an island unto yourself at times. At this event, I was fortunate to meet amazing educators from all over the globe, including a group of teachers from Qatar, Greece, the Philippines and the Netherlands who I now call friends. The more we exchanged educational and cultural perspectives, the more I was able to grow my personal learning community. I even joined Facebook for the first time as a way to continue the great dialogues we started and made a lot of new Twitter friends too. Minecraft as a teaching tool was another big takeaway. I've already incorporated this tool in my classroom, but now I'm inspired to kick things up a few notches.

ED: Can you provide an example of how you use Minecraft?

Dean: I've used it for a few years to help students comprehend math concepts like surface area, building to scale and others. Sometimes it's difficult for them to understand three-dimensional notions when they're looking at two-dimensional drawings. Minecraft allows us to create virtual shapes and 'walk' around them for a unique perspective you just can't get on paper. My students have also used Minecraft for their Genius Hour projects and in Social Studies to recreate the Coliseum.

ED: How do students respond?

Dean: Talk about redefining a lesson. With Minecraft I can meet kids where they're at and sometimes they end up teaching me. It's always cool to see the response from those kids who may not be motivated by other teaching methods; once you hit their wheel house, they take learning to a whole new level. It's pretty exciting and it leaves you wanting to try more.

ED: Do outcomes improve when students do math in Minecraft?

Dean: For the most part, yes. I'm particularly noticing that scores are going up for those kids who weren't engaged before. They're doing better on tests because their spatial skills are increased. Marks might stay the same for kids who are already motivated, but they're having more fun with it and getting new perspectives.

ED: Do you have to change the way you assess students?

Dean: I'm trying to be open to new ideas, replacing quizzes with more formative assessment tools that gauge their understanding as we progress in a lesson. That's what we're supposed to do as teachers, be assessors and help them according to their level of understanding. They can show me their work on a piece of paper, or in Minecraft; as soon as they demonstrate that they meet the curriculum outcome, they're good.

ED: What advice would you have for other teachers who may be struggling to introduce tools like Minecraft?

Dean: As much as I 'grew up' with technology – my first computer was a Commodore 64 – I still consider myself a digital immigrant. There's always something new to learn, something new to discover. If we view technology as a tool to inspire kids and recognize the potential we have as educators to redefine learning, we can take education to a whole new level just by being willing to take risks, learn from mistakes and allow students to teach us a thing or two.

This year, there will be more than 3,700 Microsoft Innovative Educator Experts from around the globe sharing their thoughts on effective use of technology in education. Read more about the program at education.microsoft.com/gettrained/mieprograms.

BE AN INNOVATOR

STUDENTS WITHOUT BORDERS

An innovative camp creates exciting new territory for learning

In April, the Conseil Scolaire Viamonde's École secondaire Jeunes sans frontières (Youth without Borders School) in Brampton, Ontario, more than lived up to its name when Principal Josée Landriault and her team of dedicated teachers organized a two-day workshop that saw students leaping across the threshold of their comfort zones – with exhilarating results.

Inspired by Microsoft Canada's Camp 21 – an interactive professional development event centered on technology in the classroom that Landriault and fellow teachers had attended the previous fall – the workshop included one day of stimulating cultural activities, followed by a second day of sessions focused on new technologies and programs, all in French and at no cost.

Landriault says that in addition to supporting the school's mandate of promoting the French language, her goal was to inspire leadership: "We wanted the workshops to be an interactive experience with students working with students – that was my vision."

Starting six months prior to the workshop, Landriault and her dedicated group of teachers worked in the wings with students from grades 9 to 12, helping them acquire the skills needed to take centre stage, including how to lead workshops, facilitate group discussions and act as camp counsellors for younger student participants from grades 5 to 8, who were invited to attend from local feeder schools. All told there were 19 student leaders among 94 workshop participants.

In addition to cultural activities, students could choose from workshops on augmented reality, Microsoft Sway and OneNote, robotics, Skype and coding. For many, it was their first time exploring advanced technologies such as 3D modeling and robotics. Overall, the experience left a lasting impression on teachers and student leaders, who shared great camaraderie over the two days, along with a high regard for the many examples of student ingenuity and leadership.

"My favourite moment was watching the kids learn these new technologies with students from other schools, and seeing them make new friends at the same time," says Alex Demelo, who led the Makey Makey workshop.

For her part, 3D modeling and printing workshop leader Vyvy Ngo, was amazed by one student in her 3D printing workshop who took the production of an ordinary keychain a step further by adding in a mini android figure. "He was able to create something that personalized it for him. It was really nice to see that," she says.

Bila Souza, who led the workshop on augmented reality, was impressed by his group's ability to rapidly apply their learning and transform a flat paper image of a human skeleton into a 3D digital version. "Once we showed them the technology, they ran with it," he says.

The highlight for Sway and OneNote workshop leader Sheeksha Jutton, was when her idea for a team chant based entirely on a mathematical equation was received with a very vocal and enthusiastic response. She was also thrilled with the collegiality of her fellow workshop leaders, noting "they all had such a positive attitude and they demonstrated great leadership abilities."

For teachers, it was gratifying to see students shine. "We had some students who were not performing well academically who were really amazed at what they could do," says teacher Marc Darrouzes.

Teacher Vincent Bénard agreed, noting that girls in the coding workshop also surprised themselves. "The seeds of future careers may have been planted," he says.

Aside from new skills and friends, students also emerged from their experience with a new border-busting attitude. "The workshop made us want to try harder and to take on more challenges," says Demelo. "It helped us break down walls and overcome the fear of learning new technologies."

Are you looking for a new way to inspire your students this year? Register your class for a Youth Spark Camp at: Microsoft.ca/youthsparkcamps or take them on a virtual fieldtrip at education.microsoft.com/skypeintheclassroom.

MAKING THE GRADE: HOW DO WE ASSESS 21ST

No-grades classrooms. Game-based learning. A cascading model of inquiry-based teaching that starts with the 'end' and allows kids to figure out the 'means.' Educators are embracing these and other novel approaches to learning with inspiring results, but are their assessment practices keeping pace?

Zoe Branigan-Pipe, teacher/leader for the Gifted Program at Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board and instructor at Brock University's Hamilton, Ontario campus, sees room for change. The more that pedagogy shifts to project-based, collaborative learning, the more teachers need forward-thinking ways to evaluate student knowledge, she says.

"We want kids to invent, be innovative, enrich themselves and their lives, and learn about global goals. All of these require creativity and it's really hard to measure that," says Branigan-Pipe, a Microsoft Innovative Educator Expert who believes kids are currently assessed based on curriculum goals versus what they actually know.

One difficulty is the current ceiling or limit placed on learning. Whether it's called an "A" or "Level 4" or some other descriptive, there's a clear path to the highest grade and students often fixate on doing the minimum needed to attain it. "I believe there's an opportunity to shift away from specific marks, to empower kids to seek more and want more than just: 'How do I get an A?'" she says.

Time to rethink grades

Garfield Gini-Newman, co-author of *Creating Thinking Classrooms* and senior national consultant with The Critical Thinking Consortium, argues it's time to redefine what an A means. In the past, grades were a measure of "compliance and replication." Teachers would disseminate information, students would study it, and tests were administered to test recall.

Today, classrooms are more about collaborative learning. Teachers co-teach with their students and embark on learning quests designed to get kids problem solving. "Technology has blown open the doors for learning," says Gini-Newman. "We can bring in experts from around the world, we can bring in facets of learning we never could have dreamed of 20 years ago, and that allows learning to be much more authentic in nature."

Gini-Newman identifies a need to move from "fake-fake" to "real-real" on the assessment scale. Traditional teaching methods often fall under fake-fake because it's difficult for students to connect a written test or report to life outside of school. On the other hand, when science is taught by planting a vegetable garden and delivering fresh produce to a local food bank, kids engage in real-real learning that offers both authentic input and output – they learn by doing and they share that learning with an audience beyond their school.

"Too often students see assessment as an inquisition of their work. They submit an assignment, hold their breath and wait to be judged," says Gini-Newman. "We'll know we're getting it right when we've shifted assessment to be a collaborative search for excellence, where kids eagerly approach teachers seeking guidance and help so they can learn more."

Is the Canadian education system ready to do away with limits? How will we measure student success in a world without As, honour rolls and academic medals? Share your thoughts on Twitter: @MicrosoftEduCA.

OneNote is a great tool to personalize learning tasks or launch student e-portfolios. Find out how to get started at onenoteforteachers.com.

CENTURY LEARNERS?

Martha Jez, director of professional development at Fair Chance Learning in Toronto, agrees students today need to "own their learning." She considers kids to be pioneers, using technology like Skype, Minecraft, 3D printing, Sway and OneNote to generate authentic learning artifacts and to be intimately connected to their learning as it unfolds.

"I'm not sure grades as they stand now accurately reflect engagement and motivation, and allow for personalization of learning tasks," says Jez.

Be deliberate about e-portfolios

Though standardized testing and grades won't disappear overnight, schools can start to experiment with new evaluation approaches by launching small-scale pilot projects, says Jason Ohler, author of *4Four Big Ideas for the Future: Understanding Our Innovative Selves.* After consulting at an international school in Tokyo where he helped parents see value in allowing kids to take fewer advanced placement courses and demonstrate their learning through creative expression instead, Ohler believes educators and parents are ready to absorb change. The problem, he says, is no one wants to be first to "experiment with their kids' future."

Developing student e-portfolios is one way to start the shift towards a more descriptive assessment model. An e-portfolio can be a blog, OneNote folder, web-based app like Prezi or a feature of an educational software platform like Desire2Learn. Students and teachers populate the space with accomplishments, presentations, extracurricular activities, hobbies or volunteer work, along with reflections on their learning, and it becomes a one-stop place to showcase everything about that student's progress.

"If we're all worried about the trail we're leaving behind online, then let's leave a deliberate trail and make sure our e-portfolio is the first thing other people find," says Ohler, who would like to see an institution-wide e-portfolio approach adopted at the high school level at a minimum.

Another model emerging to help educators evaluate student work is the notion of self-assessment. Not to be confused with evaluating or marking – which remains the responsibility of teachers – self-assessing means students understand their learning goals and are able to recognize when they need to seek extra help or rethink their answers.

"Assignments need to have an authentic purpose and kids need to feel in control of their own learning so that self-assessing comes naturally," says Branigan-Pipe. "Then, as teachers, we can provide feedback without setting limits, because we really don't know what those limits are anymore, do we?"

> "We'll know we're getting it right when we've shifted assessment to be a collaborative search for excellence, where kids eagerly approach teachers seeking guidance and help so they can learn more
>
> — Garfield Gini-Newman, The Critical Thinking Consortium

ENGAGING METHODS

Informing parents through tweets, posts, portals and text alerts is the way of the future

They don't take courses. They don't receive report cards. They don't even come to school each day. Yet, the parents at Island Lakes Community School, part of Winnipeg's Louis Riel School Division, are active school participants – often knowing what takes place before their children arrive home.

Teachers are getting so comfortable tweeting, blogging, Skyping, and sharing news on the school website, parents are always in the know, explains vice-principal Darren Baker.

"When we first launched our school Twitter account, we would post every couple of days. Now we've got teachers posting what's happening as it happens," he says. "They're providing that sneak peek into their classrooms, giving parents information they might not have otherwise."

Staff are also experimenting with various education apps, using them as digital platforms to record and share student activity. At a recent parent council meeting, one parent applauded a teacher for sending home a video clip of his son's in-class presentation, giving him a front row seat – online.

Secure sharing of content, rich websites, and social media postings are all part of the division's overall effort to engage parents in student learning. This past spring, the Information Systems (IS) department took the mandate a step further by launching an interactive parent portal, designed in partnership with Kitchener, Ontario-based SchoolBundle.

With 14,000 students and 40 schools, the division was looking to provide a single view into everything related to a child's school experience, from administrative details and calendars to homework assignments and grades.

"A parent portal was always the rainbow we were trying to chase," says Clarke Hagan, Louis Riel director of IS. The intent is to use the portal as a springboard to the myriad of other systems already used by teachers, clerical staff and principals, he adds.

The division was already using SchoolBundle as the foundation for its websites, intranet and class-specific sites, so a parent portal was the logical next step. SchoolBundle provides a single-source publishing solution that enables end-users to post information to multiple destinations as easily as posting a comment on Facebook. The complexity of keeping up-to-date with changing Internet and communication standards is handled behind the scenes.

The Louis Riel parent portal builds on data relationships already established in its student information system (SIS). Parents who supply email addresses are provided user names and passwords, and those user identities are managed internally using Microsoft Active Directory. For example, if a child turns 18 and has to authorize parent access to information, or if a parent is no longer deemed a legal guardian, the changes are automatically reflected in the portal's user access controls.

When parents log in, they see division, school and class news, and can click on their child's name for more student-specific information, including what assignments are due and when. Initially, the portal was rolled out to seven schools, including Island Lakes. Hagan says positive feedback was immediate.

"Within minutes of the announcement going out, my inbox started filling up with appreciative comments from parents," he says, noting the next step is to create a mobile app that will send alerts to mobile devices. "They won't have to go to the content, the content will come to them."

At a time when cars are sending us information through apps, banking is done by phone and wearable tech is trending, it makes sense for parents to receive instant information about their child's school day, says SchoolBundle owner and CEO Chris Federico.

"Eventually, parents won't have to visit a school website or log in to a portal to know buses were cancelled," he says. "If their preference is a mobile device, it will be broadcast there."

Still chasing the rainbow when it comes to parent engagement? Learn more about developing secure, information-rich portals at schoolbundle.ca.

TORONTO SCHOOL BOARD CONNECTS THE DOTS FOR 21ST CENTURY LEARNING

Self-reflective toolkit empowers teachers to move forward one lesson at a time

When the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) made a bold decision to give superintendent Lori DiMarco a dedicated portfolio for 21st century learning in September, 2012, the goal was to raise awareness. What the job would entail remained somewhat a mystery. That is, until DiMarco experienced her aha moment at the Microsoft Learning Partners Global Forum in Prague later that year.

Invited as a Canadian judge, DiMarco attended a workshop to learn more about the judging rubric, derived from an Innovative Teaching and Learning (ITL) Research project sponsored by Microsoft and conducted by SRI International. The more she heard, the more she realized she had found an answer.

"It was the best professional development I've ever attended," recalls DiMarco, whose portfolio has since expanded to include information communications and technology (ICT). "I realized very quickly that the rubric was exactly what we had been looking for."

The board was already working on Project NeXt, an initiative to define and support 21st century learning launched in the summer of 2012 and focused on the 'four Cs' of Communication, Collaboration, Creativity and Critical Thinking. The judging rubric proved to be the ideal launch pad to move the initiative forward and foster real pedagogical change.

In collaboration with Brock University professor Dr. Camille Rutherford, Microsoft Partners in Learning and ITL Research, the TCDSB used the rubric as the basis to create the NeXt Lesson, a self-reflection tool to help teachers review and adapt their existing learning activities and align them with 21st century learning goals. Like the rubric, the NeXt Lesson incorporates six core competencies that should be present in 21st century learning: collaboration, real-world problem solving and innovation, knowledge construction, self-regulation, skilled communication, and use of ICT for learning.

"We wanted to get teachers thinking about what they were doing and to be intentional about trying to shift it," explains DiMarco.

The tool is clear, concise and easy to implement. Teachers select a learning activity they are already using, focus on one core competency at a time, and apply the rubric to gauge where their activity falls on the spectrum, from 1 (entry-level) to 5 (transformative). For example, under collaboration the minimum goal is getting students to work in pairs or groups, whereas the highest goal is ensuring a project can't be completed unless all partners work together.

"You don't have to focus on all six competencies at once and you don't have to change everything," says DiMarco. "We say start small, take one element, and shift it."

Initially, the self-reflection tool was introduced to eight teachers, one from each superintendent area, including Joe Russo. At the time, Russo was teaching at a very busy school where he was so focused on meeting the complex needs of his students, he wasn't really paying attention to 21st century learning. He says he found the approach extremely intuitive.

"The thick booklet seemed intimidating at first, but I found I could consider it at my own pace," says Russo, who now serves as TCDSB technology enabled learning and teaching contact, and holds a vice-principal role in the 21st Century Learning and ICT department. "At the end of the day, it was about improving my practice and acknowledging the importance of addressing 21st century skills," he says.

The board has since held workshops for principals, vice-principals, senior staff, classroom teachers and resource teachers, and continues to facilitate ongoing professional development through its 21C Innovators program. Teachers are encouraged to bring what they consider to be their best 21st century learning lesson and often leave with the realization they were simply "sticking technology in" versus shifting pedagogy, says Russo.

"Ideally we strive to move more learning activities towards transformation. This approach gives us a reasonable way to achieve it," he says.

21C learning is well under way at the TCDSB. For more on best practices, the latest research and how to create your own transformation roadmap, visit aka.ms/showcaseschool.

BE AN EDUCATION SUPER MODEL

by Chris Kennedy, Superintendent of Schools/CEO, West Vancouver Schools

A short decade ago, schools were banning YouTube videos and forbidding students from bringing cellphones to class. Teachers were primarily viewed as content providers. Students were tested on how well they knew their facts.

Today there are movements under way to remove standardized testing. Schools are embracing bring-your-own-device policies. The Internet is a standard classroom tool and teachers are focused more on teaching kids how to learn, not what.

Change is happening right under our noses. We're in the midst of it every day as we move to modernize the Canadian education system, improve our classrooms, and nurture the next generation of learners. But are we actually transforming education? Will we witness a disruptive moment similar to Uber in the taxi industry or Netflix in the movie rental business?

I'm not so sure. I'm not even sure we should be chasing it.

There's something comforting about the notion of schools as community gathering places where we meet face-to-face and make strong personal connections that have always been deeply rooted in education. Schools, by their very nature, will always need to balance tradition and new ways of thinking. Our transformation has to be slower because we have to be sure we're bringing everybody along with us: administrators, teachers, students and parents alike.

One way to facilitate change is to model the system we are trying to create. I blog because I know it's hard to do. It's difficult to find time and you need to be brave enough to leave your innermost thoughts out there for scrutiny.

Students face the same challenges when we ask them to create digital portfolios; teachers when we expect them to develop class websites or start sending tweets. It's easier to say we need to change things in the classroom if we're also making changes ourselves.

Ask yourself if your school board is modeling the same modern experience you wish to see portrayed in your schools. Is the business office side collaborating with the education side? Have you introduced technology like Skype to conduct meetings? Are you still working in silos?

At West Vancouver Schools, we make a point of integrating business and education. When we hold a learning showcase, our Human Resources Director, Facilities Director and Secretary/Treasurer are just as engaged as

> "One way to facilitate change is to model the system we are trying to create

our Directors of Instruction, and they believe they should be. Our office spaces have shifted to an open concept model with furniture that facilitates sharing.

Sometimes there's this belief out there that educators are not onside with change. I would argue it's the exact opposite: teachers get into teaching to excite kids about learning and help them connect that learning to life outside the school building. What better time to be doing that than right here, right now?

Our culture of learning in Canada is constantly shifting. Continue to support teachers, encourage them to follow their passions and step outside of their comfort zones. Most importantly, foster change by being willing to change yourself.

Are you ready for epic change in education or do you find comfort in a slower, more gradual transformation? Share your perspective with Chris on Twitter: @chrkennedy.

Explore the world of technology certification at aka.ms/imagineacademy.

POSITIVELY CERTIFIABLE

Surrey students score high with new certification program

What's better than earning an A in high school? At Surrey Christian School in Surrey, British Columbia, students also excel at meeting the real-life needs of today's workplace by achieving expert status in one of the world's leading productivity tools.

This year, the school added Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification to its regular InfoTech curriculum, ushering in a new wave of youth who are excelling in OneNote, PowerPoint, Word, Excel and Access. Using the Microsoft Imagine Academy Program and testing, more than 100 students achieved certification and 88 passed on their first attempt.

"This is different from other school tests because I know my score will be seen by employers," says Kyle, a Grade 11 student who is now certified in Word and plans to enrol in a post-secondary computer science program. "I just learned as I went. It was more straightforward than I expected."

InfoTech, an elective offered in grades 8 through 11, is the ideal setting to launch a certification program, says Darryl deBoer, director of learning at Surrey Christian School. The school's goal was twofold: First, to better equip students to succeed in other courses where Office programs are used for completing assignments. Second, to make them proficient in one of the top three skills demanded by today's competitive job market.

"As a school, we really want to matter to our community, so part of the vision behind introducing certification is to give our students a skill set that allows them to matter beyond our school walls," he says.

At the start of the 2015/16 school year, nine students had enrolled in teacher Mike Jonker's grade 11 InfoTech. As word about the new certification component spread, that number quickly jumped to 20. "I've never had this level of interest all around," says Jonker. "I'm overwhelmed by how well they've performed."

Surrey Christian School's experience is indicative of a growing trend, says Malcolm Knox, president and CEO of CCI Learning, a Microsoft Education partner that provides technology solutions and administers certification exams in Canada. What used to be classified as an IT certification is now considered a productivity tool set. Employers are seeking it, students want it, and even parents are asking for it, he says.

CCI Learning is focused on ensuring that learning education technology is a positive experience. The company's certification solution is self-paced, interactive and is designed to allow students to work at their own comfort level and the company also provides support for teachers.

"We understand that taking an exam is actually among the six most stressful things you do in life, but we also know that if you get through that exam and pass, it's extremely exhilarating," says Knox. "Our brand portrays fun, humour and lightheartedness, because at the end of the day we have to get teachers interested in bringing business credentials to their students and that takes a lot of relationship building."

In 2015, CCI Learning certified 25,000 school kids in the state of Washington. Knox expects to see a similar explosion of interest in Canada now that Office 365 is widely available to schools and students.

At Surrey Christian School, staff will be offering a grade 12 InfoTech elective for the first time next year due to high student demand. Noah (pictured above, left), currently in Grade 10, performed so well on his Excel certification exam he was named Canadian champion and will be vying for the MOS World Championship title in Orlando in August.

"He absolutely loves it," says his mom, Maria, adding that for someone who's usually quiet, Noah is speaking up about his accomplishments. "He's actually coming up to me to tell me about it," she says.

Noah already updated his résumé to include his new abilities. And this summer he'll be working as an intern at a local IT firm. Maria's only challenge now is keeping pace. "I'm not a techie, so I'm trying to learn about it too," she says.

Is it time to incorporate office productivity skills, including Microsoft certification, into the Canadian school curriculum? Share your opinion on Twitter: @MicrosoftEduCA.

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Happenings

MONTREAL SCHOOL BOARD RESETS THE STANDARD FOR SUCCESS

"When a teacher is in front of a group of students, the computer has to work. That's it. That's all." That's the message from Daniel Martin, IT director at the Montreal School Board, after embarking on a herculean project to standardize 28,000 board-wide computers on Microsoft Windows 10 and Office 365.

For years, the Board adhered to a decentralized model which meant a mixed bag of hardware, software and operating systems that was difficult to support and often presented challenges to staff such as frozen screens and error messages. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that computer purchases doubled over the past five years while IT staff was halved. Standardization enables IT to circumvent resource-draining issues and means teachers and education specialists have fewer programs to learn – a huge productivity boon for the growing number of personnel who work in more than one school.

"Quebec has invested a lot in technology over the years, but to have an impact on student success, teachers have to be at ease," Martin says. "A computer has to be like a pencil. You pick it up and you use it. You have to give teachers and specialists the right tools so they can concentrate on their real jobs, which is to generate content and to teach."

To date, Martin and his team have deployed Office 365 services to all students and teachers, installed Windows 10 on some Board computers, and are looking forward to completing the project early in 2017. In the meantime, he is inspired by some of the stories he is hearing from teachers and specialists who are benefitting from the new streamlined approach to IT management, citing how one group of teachers working with special needs students is using OneNote to transfer customized teaching materials to their peers.

Do you have a technology challenge that needs solving? Learn more about Microsoft's approach at microsoft.ca/education.

Transform learning and teaching

Microsoft's new Transformation Learning Series allows you to discover how others are achieving successful school transformation by participating in showcase school visits, regional events and interactive webinars hosted by leading academic researchers.

The program is modeled after the Education Transformation Framework and will investigate 10 critical conversations that are proven to drive system wide transformation. Two key themes of the series are leadership and policy. Regional visits within Canada to facilitate best practice sharing and system-wide transformation strategies will take place next spring.

Visit microsoft.ca/transformEDU to register and learn more about the program. Email questions to eduexec@microsoft.com.

Become a Microsoft Innovative Educator Expert

The Microsoft Innovative Educator (MIE) programs are designed to help educators who have just started integrating Microsoft tools into the classroom to become leaders of innovation in education.

As an MIE, you can nominate yourself for the MIE Expert program, created exclusively to recognize global educator visionaries who are using technology to pave the way for their peers for better learning and student outcomes. MIE Experts work closely with Microsoft to lead innovation in education, while providing their thoughts on the effective use of technology in education with peers and policy makers. They also provide feedback to Microsoft on new products and tools for education. To learn more, visit aka.ms/mieexpert.

YouthSpark Camps and Field Trips

YouthSpark Camps get kids of all ages coding, creating games and apps through multi-day visits to their local Microsoft Store. The beginner-level Kodu Makerspace camp teaches kids coding fundamentals to build games, while the Learn to Code Flatverse teaches them how to build their Flatverse game using TouchDevelop. The Start Your Own Business interactive camp offers entrepreneurial kids the knowledge, tools and support to make their business idea a reality.

Youth Spark camps can be found at Microsoft stores in these Canadian cities:

- Mississauga, Square One Shopping Centre
- Toronto, Eaton Centre
- Toronto, Yorkdale Shopping Centre
- Calgary, Chinook Centre
- Edmonton, West Edmonton Mall
- Burnaby, Metropolis at Metrotown
- Vancouver, Pacific Centre

A YouthSpark Field Trip at the Microsoft store uses Microsoft technology such as TouchDevelop, Kodu, and Project Spark to get kids familiar with the coding environment through fun, exploration and designing games. Trips range in length and are designed for groups of all ages and skill levels. For more information or to register, visit microsoft.ca/youthsparkcamps.

Share your thoughts about the articles in this magazine on Twitter: @MicrosoftEduCA.