

Snap shots of the Digital school

How teachers are taking advantage of the Digital School

Colin Rose

Part One - Anytime, Anywhere Learning

Joanna was visiting a sick relative in the West of England. Her school was in London.

Yet the 16 year-old was able access both the key points of the lessons she missed – which was recorded by her teacher - and her assignment online. Even though her family was away and she was able to send everything back on time.

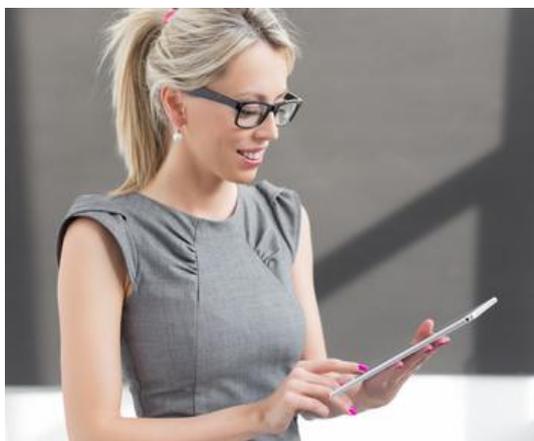
“It's very helpful when you miss a class or even a day of school because everything that needs to be learned and done is right there on the school Learning Platform” said Jane. “It automatically saves all of my work. It's really convenient, easy to organise and it cuts out a lot of paper”

Teachers across the UK and the world are incorporating more technology into the classroom these days, using laptop and tablet computers to help students learn. Moreover the same software that runs these teacher-student interactions is also improving teacher/parent interactions.



I have spent time interviewing teachers, students and parent about the Digital School in both the UK and USA and Head Teacher Chris Blore is a typical enthusiastic convert.

“I was initially hesitant, because I thought it would need a lot of retraining”, he said. “But in fact mastering the technology is not at all a problem. What does take some time is to really exploit the very significant pedagogical advantages in a creative way. Schools do need Professional Development for that.”



“For example, teachers can send pre-recorded tutorials out to students via their computers that help students understand everything from science and maths problems to musical scores. The advantage is that it is always there for the students – even if they don't get it the 8th time that's OK. They can still watch it until they do understand.”

Jane's school uses a website and communications platform called Its Learning – which is now in Poland. It lets teachers post learning materials, class calendars, assignments, grades, research material

and web links online for students to access.

Pupils are willing to spend more time on their studies because they enjoy the technology and the faster feedback from teachers – which increases their productivity in the same way as technology has improved productivity in every other part of life.

“At the same time it is preparing them for the world of work,” says Blore. “Anywhere they go in the future workplace, they're going to be using this type of technology.”

My teachers are also beginning to use ‘Flipped Learning’ for some lessons”, Blore continues. They record the key points of a lecture with a simple program and post it online, for students to watch for homework. Then they discuss the lecture the next day in class. That allows us to go into a lot more depth and discussion. There’s more buzz and collaboration in the classes when you do that. Students like it. I find that students are thinking more deeply about the topics”.

Parents like it too. “We're able to access the platform from home, and I can see my daughter’s grades,” says a parent. “If you need to contact a teacher, their email is right there. It's high tech but easy and the kids are getting really well prepared for college, where they will have learn more independently”

Another teacher Joanna Measures commented to me said she's seen technology evolve from pencil and paper to tablets and tablet PCs during her 25-year career.

She said the technology allows her students to communicate at a non-threatening level with teachers when they might be reluctant to raise their hands in class.

“One of the advantages of the Its Learning platform is that students can access either in class or remotely from any make of device. Students are encouraged to bring their own devices, including electronic notebooks, i-Pads or tablet PCs to school for use in class.

I encourage students to research online, submit rough drafts of essays online and answer questions on-line – so I have a real-time way to assess how much each individual student understands. Then I can give them tasks that better match their current level of understanding. But I still use paper and pen quite a lot in class – the trick is to blend different learning methods. Technology is an enhancement for me.”

A student commented to me: “I find that I can lose concentration in a lecture – but when the topic is on-line I can go at my own pace.”

Another advantage of the Digital School offers is closer collaboration on projects with students working together in real time from different locations.

For example, says Blore “We have digital literature circles. Students read a book or passage and prepare to discuss that document at home. As they're preparing for that discussion they're working virtually with four or five other students in real time”

Preparing for the future

I am conscious that this is a snap shot of where we are heading in Poland – but I have always believed that you must start with the vision.

In practice I am keen that schools begin their Digital School with Interactive Whiteboards – which is a good start point for introducing technology – and build from there.

But schools must also train students to be better at the *process* of learning – so they are able to take advantage of the huge learning opportunities outside the classroom – and that means ensuring that they are more skilled, self-managed, independent learners.

And schools must train teachers how to teach students these learning skills. It is the foundation of a successful Digital School. Because the purpose of the Digital School isn't technology – it is being able to personalise learning. The technology is only a tool – albeit a transformational tool.

PS. This site will regularly offer ideas for innovative use of IWBs – as well as continuing these snap shots of the wider use of technology.



Colin Rose is learning expert, a consultant to Educational authorities and a key note speaker at many educational conferences. He was a co-founder of the National UK's Campaign for Learning. He works with the Institute of Innovative Education based in Warsaw and is involved in the creation of the Digital School Academy.

The Digital School Academy offers a blended learning program to train teachers in how to develop students' learning and thinking skills.

Meet Sid <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J25d9aC1GZA>