GOING DIGITAL IN THE CLASSROOM?

Understanding workflow is a must

By Anthony Carabache

Once upon a time, workflow in the classroom was pretty straightforward. The teacher would conduct a lesson, assign the work and we, as students, would complete the work and submit it. Today we have adopted a much more complicated workflow that processes student work and, more importantly, processes learning, goal-setting, success criteria, and timely, ongoing feedback before assessment.

Here are some keys that will help you establish a workflow for your classroom. Non-tech options are also provided.

1. **Identify your goals.**
   Your goals may be curricular, technical, pedagogical, or all of the above.
2. **Select a non-invasive, sanctioned tool to use in the classroom.**
   The trendiness of classroom innovation has flooded the market with tools that may not always respect our privacy as teachers or our students' privacy. Be selective when considering your tools.
3. **Be OK with retooling your workflow.**
   The only way to test your workflow is by using it in the classroom. This also gives you the opportunity to cultivate student voice and include students as architects and engineers of the workflow.

Below is an example of a workflow for Grade 7 science.

SAMPLE WORKFLOW

Curriculum Goals: Understanding the impact of human activities on our environment.
Technology Workflow Goals: To go paperless for this unit.
Pedagogical Goals: To provide feedback through discussions and keep a record of learning.
Tool: Desire2Learn Virtual Learning Environment

Below is a mini-lesson about discussion etiquette, which is related to the Ontario Catholic Graduate Expectations of responsible citizenship and collaborative contributor.

STAGE 1: Expose the goal.
Jumping Point: How does the production of millions of devices worldwide impact our environment?
Tech Workflow: Post the "jumping point" question in the NEWS area of Desire2Learn.
Non-Tech Workflow: Post the "jumping point" question centrally on a bulletin board.

STAGE 2: Provide a means for discussion and a timeframe.
Tech Workflow: Now post the "jumping point" question on a discussion board in Desire2Learn and ask students to submit a digital source of information that will help their understanding of the question. The students should explain their selection in a meaningful way.
Non-Tech Workflow: Distribute post-it notes to the class and devote some time to brainstorm responses to the "jumping point" question. Students can then post their responses as groups or individuals to a bulletin board. This now becomes a public discussion board.

You may cover the bulletin board with a large white sheet to signify when it is available and when it is "offline." Also be sure to talk about discussion etiquette and the consequences for violations.

STAGE 3: Capture the learning and provide feedback.
Tech Workflow: By virtue of going digital, discussions are automatically captured. Spend some time reading and responding to your students. Try to give them further direction and challenge.
Non-Tech Workflow: Take a picture of the bulletin board to capture the student work. Reply to the students with your own post-it, privately or publicly, depending on context.

Where does this go next?

Remember that a workflow is only as effective as its focus. In this case, the workflow was designed specifically to support a curricular goal by using discussion as a way to provide feedback, and to go paperless, using Desire2Learn. Logically, the next step would be to design a workflow that allows you to accept student work on the issue.

Knowing the three keys to designing workflow will make that next step a lot easier. More importantly, sharing those keys with your students will bring everyone onto the same page – whether it's digital or paper.

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