

Action Research Plan: Asynchronous Learning

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Supervision of Instruction

Action Research Question

How can a supervisor encourage professional development and growth by assisting teachers in engaging in asynchronous professional learning?

Action Research Focus:

The education world has been transformed during the last decade by advancements in technology and the implications in our teaching world have been far reaching. Not only are teachers expected to be fluent in an ever-changing digital world, they are also expected to be engaging their students in digital literacy at every grade. With Alberta Education's mandate "Inspiring Education", specific policies will be implemented that require "Digitally confident teachers, administrators and other education professionals." It is expected that these digitally confident teachers:

- a. are well prepared to use technology and digital resources innovatively and effectively for learning, teaching, leadership and administration*
- b. use technology and research to design personalized, authentic and student-centred learning opportunities to meet the diverse needs and interests of all students*
- c. engage in professional growth opportunities that are broadened and diversified through technology, social media and communities of practice (Alberta Education).*

Because of these changes in policy and less traditional approach to teaching and learning, teachers need to continue to grow and develop as professionals. The Learning and Technology Policy Framework (Alberta Education, 2013) contains five policy directions: Student Centred Learning, Research and Innovation, Professional Learning, Leadership, Access Infrastructure and Digital Learning Environments (p.16). For teachers to make the framework come alive in their classrooms, they must engage in the process themselves. They will be required to engage in professional learning in order to develop these competencies and lead students towards higher achievement using these tools. By engaging in their own asynchronous professional learning, teachers will learn valuable skills, explore shifts in pedagogical thinking and become effective at utilizing these skills in the classroom to enhance student learning. The Framework states,

“Technology is used to support student-centred, personalized, authentic learning for all students” (p.16) and in order to make learning authentic for our students, we have to engage as professionals.

Asynchronous learning has a myriad of benefits to offer in the realm of professional development. The traditional model of professional development where “one size fits all” full day sessions often leave the teacher alone to transfer those ideas into classroom practice. This method is becoming more outdated, less used and far less effective. An alternative strategy is to engage teachers is to tailor learning to their own personal needs and allow them to engage in meaningful professional development that suits their own unique context. Robin Flanigan (2012) in her article, “Professional Learning Networks Taking Off” describes benefits to approaching professional development in this alternative manner, “Administrators and teachers say such networks reduce isolation, promote autonomy, and provide inspiration by offering access to support and information not only within a school but also around the globe.” Teachers can participate when the timing is right for them, they can access exactly what they are interested in and they are able to make connections with teachers around the globe, making professional learning diverse and widespread. Flanigan concludes her article by stating, “It’s all about professional generosity, spontaneity, synergy, and synchronicity.” When we give teachers back the power to control their own learning and professional development we allow them to re-engage as professionals which directly impacts school improvement.

Needs Assessment:

Before beginning the project, a needs assessment for professional development must be conducted. Information will be collected about the past and present state of professional development in the school. Prior to launching any school improvement plan, a supervisor must engage in conversations with all stakeholders to gain perspective. At the most basic level I would include an Eye's and Ears Assessment (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon) to meet individually or with small groups to assess what staff believe are the strengths and weaknesses of the current professional development model. Questions such as, "How is it being used? Is it helpful and in what ways? Where does it break down? When is it not useful?" (p. 181) would be discussion points in our conversations.

After preliminary discussions have occurred I may also ask for feedback in a more formal Written-Open Ended Survey (Glickman, Gordon & Gordon-Ross, 2014) where I would gather data from teachers to assess their current knowledge about using technology to achieve professional development. A few of the questions I may include would be: Are teachers currently engaged in any online or asynchronous professional learning? What sites or resources were being accessed? What areas do they feel they would need more support in?

In addition, because the improvement plan focuses on teacher development and student achievement, I would conduct some classroom observations to gather data regarding instructional methods used in classrooms throughout the building. During these assessments I would review student and teacher work products, collect data on what types of student projects are being created and with what technology tools in order to identify instructional needs and strengths.

After the initial needs assessments we would gather the data and correlate it for staff consideration. I would engage lead teachers and the professional development committee in this process. Together we would present the strengths and weaknesses in our professional development program and engage teachers in professional conversations about what role asynchronous learning could play in helping us achieve our school improvement goals.

As an administration team, prior to launching any improvement plan, we would consider the following four questions that Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon (2014) present corresponding to technical supervisory tasks:

1. *What type and frequency of direct assistance must be provided to teachers to reach our instructional goals?*
2. *What meetings and discussions need to be arranged as part of group development for faculty to share and reach our instructional goals?*
3. *What professional development opportunities, such as lectures, workshops, demonstrations, courses, and visits, need to be provided for faculty to reach our instructional goals?*
4. *What is the necessary curriculum development in terms of course content, curriculum guides, lesson plans, and instructional materials to reach our instructional goals?*

(p. 326)

Needs Assessment Common Themes:

Theme:	Support for Need:
Professional Learning is required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student centered learning is our priority ● We will use asynchronous professional learning to improve student learning ● Building teacher capacity ● Opportunities for PD
Time and Resource Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Limited time: Weekly PLC time maintained, release time, time for collaborative teacher planning, use of PD days for professional learning ● Resources: sufficient funds for PD

	available for each teacher, access to web based supports, access to divisional technology director
Aligning Professional Technology Use with Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify tools can we use to support students in engaging with the curriculum ● Exploration of Alberta Education’s Competencies
Increased sharing of professional learnings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building bank of resources to support asynchronous learning ● Time during PD days to have sharing occur
Focus on Key areas for Professional Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Integrating technology into curriculum ● Use of Inclusive Technology Tools ● Bring Your Own Device Initiative (divisional) ● Using asynchronous resources as a platform for learning

When considering our professional development in an asynchronous environment, our ultimate goal is for our own professional development to be able to have positive impacts on our instruction. Our next steps would be to gather as a teaching staff and plan how to move forward together once the need for professional development in this area has been established.

Action Plan At A Glance:

Long Term Goal: How can a supervisor encourage professional development and growth by assisting teachers in engaging in asynchronous professional learning?		
Action	Timeline	Most Responsible
Lead Teachers meet with administration team to review needs assessments and plan staff presentation	September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Administration team ● Lead Teachers
Develop staff understanding about professional development expectations and share needs assessment	September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Administration team

<p>Introduction to using Asynchronous learning as a form of Professional Development</p> <p>Exploring Best Practices of Asynchronous Learning: what are the benefits, what are the weaknesses, how can they be used to enhance school and teacher PD?</p> <p>Encourage teachers when drafting Teacher Professional Growth Plans to create a goal about Asynchronous Learning</p>	<p>September/ October</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Administration team ● Lead teachers
<p>Teacher examples of Asynchronous learning (ie. blogging, twitter, classroom/teacher websites, online discussion boards, School-based SharePoint site)</p>	<p>Ongoing throughout the year</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Administration ● PD committee and Lead Teachers
<p>PLC group research and experimenting with different formats for professional learning</p>	<p>ongoing, weekly basis for each teacher</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● PLC teacher groups ● individual teacher participation
<p>Develop a bank of resources for teachers to access with “how to” information, place for teachers to post links to their own learning and asynchronous sites</p>	<p>October-end of year</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● PD committee ● individual teachers access and add throughout the year
<p>Professional Development days used for PD on asynchronous learning (i.e. different forms of asynchronous learning, how to sign up/navigate, teacher development and exploration)</p>	<p>October-May PD days</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● PD committee ● Technology director (to assist with PD day topics & presentations)
<p>Addition of school twitter feed to school website</p>	<p>Begin in January</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Administration team ● Technology director ● Lead teachers ● individual teachers
<p>Teachers begin creation of blogs or classroom websites and link to school webpage</p>	<p>Begin to link in March</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Individual teachers teachers

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology director
Begin to engage and involve school council in our discussions surrounding benefits of asynchronous learning in the classroom	April/May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead teachers involved in school council • administration team
<p>Staff celebrations of learning-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • showcasing learning • what impact it has had on teaching • successes and/or areas of improvement or weakness • evaluating our progress based on needs assessment and data gathered • year end PD Survey to assess needs going forward <p>Setting goals for next year: How do we use what we have learned this year, to impact our students learning going forward?</p>	April/May PD day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration team to lead discussions and setting of goals for next year • PD committee • teaching staff-sharing

Implementation of Action Plan:

Beginning a new improvement plan or action research project requires a supervisor to begin with a clear picture of what our goal is, what we hope to accomplish, and a plan to assist staff in making our goal reality. In this case, I would begin our action plan having a strong sense of control on the project, making sure that our PD team and teacher leaders have a strong sense of understanding about the project we are undertaking. Slowly, I would begin to be able to take a more collaborative and in some cases depending on the teacher, non-directive approach to my supervision.

In the initial stages, I would work closely with the PD committee to ensure that appropriate professional learning opportunities are being offered to ensure staff increase their knowledge about what asynchronous learning is, and how it can impact their professional development. I

would also be working closely with lead teachers, who may already be engaged in asynchronous professional learning, to make our action plan and provide support in the beginning stages of the plan. One of the most important ways I can offer support in the beginning stages is through creative timetabling. As teachers begin to engage in meaningful professional development, my responsibility would be to make sure that they have time on a weekly basis in their Professional Learning Community to meet and explore the topics and different avenues for professional learning.

As staff begins to get on board with our action plan I will be able to step back and allow teachers to take on more of the responsibility of planning our professional development days, and to allow them to take ownership of the project. I would begin having daily informal conversations with teachers about their learning, modelling my own professional development and use of asynchronous learning and encouraging teachers to share what they are working on in our staff meetings and on our staff resource site. As part of my weekly classroom walkthroughs, I will encourage teachers when they are taking risks and using technology in classroom and continue to support their efforts.

Along the way, there will be teachers with lower levels of skill, motivation or readiness in this area. As a supervisor, I will need to take a more directive approach with them. Some ways to increase my supervision with these teachers are to offer small group or one on one sessions to assist teachers, continued supervision and encouragement of teachers who are hesitant to use technology, encourage peer coaching or work one on one to help a teacher sign up or navigate a webpage, blog or twitter account. Another key role, will be ensuring that the PD committee and lead teachers have the necessary resources (i.e. planning time, release time, school budget) and technology available to them when needed. As the project continues, I hope that

other teachers who are currently using technology and asynchronous learning will begin to emerge as leaders.

Evaluation of Plan:

- Creation of staff twitter feed with majority of staff engaged and represented
- Creation of staff webpages or blogs on school website
- Increased staff sharing of resources, learning and online tools (aim for 2-3 teachers to share at each PD day)
- Focused PD Questionnaire - teachers report increased happiness with Professional development opportunities
- Teacher Evaluation Survey
- Observations of classroom walkthroughs - teachers using asynchronous learning in classroom
- Professional Learning Community Objectives being met (set by each PLC team)
- Increased Asynchronous PD opportunities offered and participation rates increase

Recommendations for Revision of Plan:

As the year progresses the PD committee, administration team and staff will continue to evaluate goals to ensure we are on the right path. Our action plan will remain a working document, meaning that as a learning team we will be able to modify our action steps or goals as we go and add new steps where needed. After the first year, we will engage in a formal evaluation process (as outlined above). We will revise our action steps while continuing with the long term goal of increasing professional development in the area of asynchronous learning.

As year two begins we will continue to engage in asynchronous learning and provide professional learning for teachers but I would also like to see our plan branch out and have a more direct impact on student learning. I would propose that we broaden our look at asynchronous learning and begin to seek out professional development related to using it in our own classrooms as a learning tool. Teachers would engage in part two of our plan by using

websites, blogs, twitter and other online asynchronous options as part of their students' daily learning. This second year of the plan would focus more on identifying and using asynchronous learning tools, as well as investigating best practices surrounding asynchronous learning in the classroom. It is imperative that as a staff we look at how our students engage online and how we ensure we are creating responsible digital citizens. During the second year we include parents and community stakeholders in this process and share what we have learned with them from year one. Our school and student councils would play a much bigger role in our developing goals and guiding our process in the second year of our action plan.

References:

Alberta Education. *Learning and technology policy framework*. Retrieved from <http://www.education.alberta.ca/admin/technology/policyframework/policy3.aspx>

Flanigan, R.L. (2012). Professional learning networks taking off. *Education Digest*, 77(7), 42-45.

Glickman, C., Gordon, S., & Ross-Gordon, J. (2014). *Supervision and instructional leadership: A developmental approach* (9th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Additional Action Planning Links:

[AB Ed PLC Recommendations](#)

[Guide to Support Implementation: Essential Conditions](#)

[Alberta Education Baseline Technology Assessment](#)