The New Standards in Digital Learning

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Our schools face an imminent challenge—how do we embrace the latest innovations and improve learning in our classrooms? Digital learning can help educational institutions rise to the same technological standards as leading corporations. Today, classrooms are being transformed into a landscape in which computers and other digital tools are *expected*.

By implementing video collaboration infrastructure, distance learning, and cloud data storage, schools can cut budgets and still produce high-achieving students. To do so, though, schools must address some new challenges. They must adapt to increasing bandwidth demands and support students who "bring your own device" (BYOD). This often requires flexible access to instruction, content, and vast databases so up-to-date information is available to instructional staff and students.

With technology, teachers now have the opportunity to individualize student learning environments, allowing students to achieve at the rate and in the modality that works best for them. It's a lot to take on; however, there is clear evidence of improved educational performance in these enhanced collaborative environments. This large scale implementation is changing the game for educators and students on a global scale.

Strengthening connectivity makes for higher achieving students

Over the past few years, the use of smartphones and personal laptops has increased exponentially in schools. A media-savvy generation is driving the change, and growing evidence is showing that, at a minimum, streaming video and multimedia content tends to successfully engage students in active and collaborative learning. Many schools cannot afford their own in-class computer labs and are instead employing a BYOD policy. While the video infrastructure may vary, schools embracing this shift are seeing their students' learning enhanced.

With digital learning tools, students now have the chance to participate in cross-cultural exchanges, have visual fieldtrips, or access content on demand. Students who are ill or traveling and cannot physically attend school can be afforded the

opportunity to stay current. With access to large databases and distance-learning experiences, student research projects can become three-dimensional and not nearly so dependent on static library resources.

In essence, digital learning breaks barriers, both economic and cultural. It allows for all students to gain access to a world of information in their own time and at their own pace. Students in difficult environments are able to access the same materials as those from higher socio-economic school districts, thus fostering greater equity and congruence across classrooms.

Digital learning for teachers and staff saves money and time

Many schools do not have the time or resources to allocate toward professional development. Studies have shown that learning a new skill takes an average twenty separate instances of practice for mastery. Teachers and staff at all educational institutions need ongoing training rather than the typical one-day workshop of the past. With access to video collaboration solutions, schools are not only seeing a cut in their development costs, but also a marked increase in the overall effectiveness of their training.

Real-time video collaboration with peers and coaches provides ongoing support to teachers as they implement reforms within their individual classrooms. With access to cloud storage and collaborative video solutions, the necessity of grinding paperwork is greatly reduced, thus allowing teachers to spend more time on task—curriculum design and teaching. The new connectivity allows teachers

to routinely record instructional segments for their own review and reflection or to receive input from a coach. Providing access to the best coaches and mentors, once a daunting and expensive task, becomes nearly routine with interactive digital tools. Professional development, once dreaded by teachers and administrators alike, becomes more effective and at a dramatically lower cost.

Students gain a hand in their own education

Video Infrastructure and online access are changing the way students learn. Flipped classrooms offer students the ability to watch lectures on their own time and communicate with peers and teachers online. Teachers can now use their classroom time to lead activities and discussions that drive home the subject matter in a more memorable and engaging way. Distance learning can provide students with access to experts and experiences across the globe while minimizing the limitations of cost, time, and travel. And personalized learning plans use various tools and technology to challenge students in ways that are designed specifically for each one's needs, skills, interests, and learning style.

Digital learning is here to stay. Its impact is just now beginning to be felt. Successful schools will find that the proper implementation of collaborative infrastructure, video access, digital learning tools, and cloud storage will pay enormous dividends in terms of performance.

Our students are living and working in a digital world. Schools must do their part in providing them the tools to make their learning experience up-to-date, engaging, and effective.

About the author

Elaine Shuck, with a background in technology, curriculum, and integration, is the Director of Education for Polycom. She is a leader in collaborative learning and interactive videoconferencing. For sixteen years she has brought stimulating and engaging learning opportunities to K-20 classrooms. Her work ranges from hands-on demonstrations to educators, to reaching out to Polycom's corporate partners, to facilitating hybrid solutions that enhance education and training.

Elaine is an expert in her field and a frequent speaker. Audiences around the world—both face-to-face and through videoconferencing—respond enthusiastically to Elaine's lively style, technical mastery, and commitment to learning. She has designed and implemented programs that inspire faculty and students as they interact with world-class luminaries in medicine, education, or noteworthy events. Her work has garnered major awards from the International Society for Technology in Education and the US Distance Learning Association (USDLA).

An authority on social and connective media, collaborative learning, and best practices in distance learning, Elaine works with a host of educational groups and is currently president-elect for USDLA.

About Polycom

Polycom helps organizations unleash the power of human collaboration. More than 400,000 companies and institutions worldwide defy distance with video, voice and content solutions from Polycom. Polycom and its global partner ecosystem provide flexible collaboration solutions for any environment that deliver the best user experience and unmatched investment protection.

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