

New Pedagogies for Deep Learning: Flourishing in a Complex World

Deep Learning: System Level Implementation

SPEAKER 1: Throughout Ontario, we understand that the way to improve learning for all students is to focus on building collaborative professional learning cultures across the system. In this segment, senior leaders from the Ottawa Catholic School Board share their insights about how they have intentionally imbedded deep learning into their vision, direction and operational practices for the whole organization. There is a clear understanding that deep learning is not only powerfully engaging and relevant for students, it's meaningful and stimulating for staff. Here, they explain their shared vision and clear strategy.

SPEAKER 2: My role is to find ways to communicate the vision and to ensure that they understand the why of deep learning. I've also engaged our leadership team, so the importance of our principals and vice principals, then all of our staff. But with our principals, we talked about with deep learning, we also have to have deep leadership. So we did unpack what deep leadership means, and how you can create the conditions in your school to be able to do that. And a lot of that is based on developing that trusting relationship with your staff, so that you can all move forward together. And I've often used the analogy of lift, then push.

We've prided ourselves in being a learning organization, where we value learning at all levels of the organization. I told our whole staff that I wanted them to be as creative as we want our students to be. It was an invitation to them to feel that they can take risks and that we do trust them to be able to move in a direction that might involve a little bit of change in practice, and it's okay to try it and to find their entry point where they are comfortable in coming into this particular implementation of deep learning.

SPEAKER 3: We needed to let our principals know that it's okay to try things. It is okay to fail, and we wanted them, as well, to model that for their teachers, and for the teachers for the student. So we're co-learners alongside everyone. When you walk into one of our learning sessions, you don't know who the principal is, who the teacher is or who the superintendent is. We're all together. We're learning, and we're trying to improve together, and we're trying to innovate.

SPEAKER 2: The strategy that we have now is, all schools, all in. Find your entry point, and then from there we will work together, support one another, support everybody in continuing to grow and develop in deep learning.

SPEAKER 1: Denise and Tom know that vision alone will not shift the culture to one that embraces deep learning. These senior leaders have a bias for action, and

actively consider ways the organization can best position deep learning. This means reflecting on the existing resources, removing barriers and working with all departments and stakeholders to understand what deep learning is, and how they can support it. As a result, everyone sees their role in realizing this goal.

SPEAKER 3: We looked at coherence, and we said, this is what we're trying to do with our central leadership team. We had an approach in the past where we had different departments all supporting schools, all great people working extremely hard. And they were aligned in what they were trying to do. But what we didn't have was each department understanding what the other departments were trying to do, and have a coherent approach.

SPEAKER 2: We've talked about deep learning and what impact that has on all of our employees, our education assistants, our ECEs, our custodial staff. What does that mean for them, and how do we work together? If there are some concerns or issues or barriers that arise, what can we do to make sure that it works? Mostly, it comes down to communication. It comes down to talking to one another and finding shared solutions.

SPEAKER 3: Our numeracy can involve our technology staff. It can involve our literacy individuals, so they're working in a more coherent approach. And our schools appreciate that. You don't need five different weeks in a row with different topics. You can have one support in the classroom, all bringing in that same perspective.

SPEAKER 2: There isn't an extra pot of money for this. You have to find it within our existing finances. All of them are sitting around the table along with the curriculum and learning technologies, and so on. So they're part of that discussion, so they understand the need to channel or funnel resources if our planning facilities, departments of our school, custodians were not understanding that this is good for kids, good for learning, then we wouldn't be successful in transforming our learning spaces to be those wonderful, flexible, rich learning environments. It's without question has buy-in from all departments at all levels of the organization. And we continue to discuss strategies.

SPEAKER 1: All levels of the Ottawa Catholic School Board see themselves as drivers in deep learning. Leadership is shared, and a deep culture of collaboration and networking has been fostered to promote innovation and shifts in practice.

SPEAKER 3: I would say the surprise this year was how quickly people adopted to what we had hoped would take place, and the grassroots ideas that none of us centrally would have thought of. There's so much more knowledge when you combine an entire system, and you're not relying on a top-down approach. We may

put in some seeds, but the real germination is happening at the classroom level with our teachers, and the willingness to share. It's not just our teachers, it's our education assistants and our early childhood educators. They come up with fabulous ideas that we would never have thought of at a central area. And that grassroots, with a little help and assistance, some centrally, is really part of our learning environment and our work.

SPEAKER 2: We are very strong about network learning. And so our schools have opportunities for collaborative, professional meetings within their school, but also to network with other schools within the school board so they can find and share any query around different pedagogical practices, or different ways of approaching a problem.

SPEAKER 3: It's something to be excited about, yes, when you're seeing a plan being implemented, and you're seeing staff that are embracing this, and students. It's very exciting times. It's great for education. And we don't have all the answers; we recognize that. We're learning, and we love just as much visiting another school or another board as we love having visitors into our systems that can say, did you think of, or have you heard about -- because that's where the networking is so important. We're not asking schools to replicate what school A was doing. We're saying, build on what works in your school environment. That was important as well.

SPEAKER 2: We also network with other boards, and we're very open to learning with other school boards or other districts from across the province, or across Canada. And we try to provide those opportunities.

SPEAKER 3: I think in that social capacity we have, when a teacher embraces something, and we're trying to not replicate one system to another, we're building on the benefits of each system for our own unique environments.

SPEAKER 1: Here, Tom D'Amico shares steps in their three-year cultural shift. He acknowledges the work of principals, coaches, mentors and teacher leaders that support the work at the classroom level.

SPEAKER 3: In year one, we targeted seven schools. And it really -- the constraint for the seven schools was twofold; one is we wanted one for each academic superintendent to be involved with, so we didn't want this to be a pet project for one person. And because it was a learning network on its own, we would pull teachers out.

We had a central champion consultant. She brought out four teachers from each school. The principal had to attend, so the principal was with them in that learning

environment. But we also matched them with a teacher from another school, and we combined a learning network that already existed. So each school had a superintendent supportive, a principal supportive, a core group of teachers, a teacher from another school, a technology coach from another school which was a classroom teacher, and one central staff assigned. So we had a wrap-around approach to make sure that this was not about one school and one classroom.

So by year two, schools were calling us saying, we want to be involved. Again, because it was a separate network where we had to pay release time, we were constrained. We brought in 15 schools. We paid release time to bring people out central delivery in terms of the skills that they needed, and that central support where our staff would go into the schools afterwards to say, how can I help you with your deep learning activity? Are you understanding how to use the toolkit? And they were supported with the technology from the equivalent of a technology coach, a teacher from our learning connections.

By year three, we could not sustain that model. Those steps were great, because we now had champions not at 15 schools, but probably at about 60 of our 84 schools, because when you look at the different networks they were involved with, teachers that had switched schools from year to year, principals that had moved schools, the learning connections, we had grassroots champions who understood and believed the why of why we wanted to change our teaching practice. That's probably the most important thing, is getting people to understand the why. Why do we want to change? Things are good, we're happy with our results, why would we change? So we need to see that vision of where we saw education moving in our district, and we wanted the best for our students.

Now, with our new model, we still have central staff, but every single central staff that runs a learning network, they started by receiving the in-service from our champions. We actually changed the key champion for our board, because we didn't want one person being identified with NPDL. We changed the title to Deep Learning because we didn't want it being associated just with a project. Deep learning is about learning, and every educator on our board has as their key component learning at the basis of what they're doing.

SPEAKER 1: These leaders use the new pedagogies for deep learning language, tools and protocols to establish a common language, and to build shared understanding of what deep learning is, and how to generate it. These tools also allow everyone in the organization to reflect on their own progress, and plan their next steps. This clarity builds energy, shared ownership and momentum across the district.

SPEAKER 3: Every single learning network, everything we did, whether it's a presentation at the board, whether it's our board improvement plan, our school improvement plans, our district process -- all of those included a deep learning lens. And now the language throughout the board is common. We've never had that common language. Deep learning, having one common framework, brings those altogether. We're not saying get rid of them, they're saying they fit into this new lens of looking at learning and teaching. So it's been very successful.

Each of our superintendents is using the school condition rubric. So when we visit to our schools as a means of support, we're not there to check in on anyone, we're there to support our schools. And we're using the school conditions rubric. So all of our superintendents, through their principals, will have a dialog. It's not about where do you land on this particular rubric, it's where are you currently, and what can we do to support you to get to the next step? And that common language, again, is really effective for our board, using that particular tool.

SPEAKER 2: We would see a continuing to deepen the implementation. We set an expectation of the language, the language in this first year, get to understand things. I use it when I visit schools. I find ways to point out that what you're doing is deep learning. So people are finding the connections, and I see this just continuing to deepen the implementation, to find that ability to name it and continue to do it, and to free the organization to be able to continue to deepen learning, deepen leadership, and as a result create a wonderful experience for our students.