Louis Riel School Division

Bridging the distance: Remote learning best practices and the LRSD

by

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Table of Contents

Bridging the distance: Remote learning best practices and the LRSD

Section 1: Context and Purpose of this Report

1.1 Introduction

Teaching and learning are more challenging when there is a distance between the teacher and the student, yet forms of distance education have a long history (Kentnor, 2015). It is worth noting that every form of distance learning requires a technological medium, a go-between, to bridge the distance between the teacher and the student. Correspondence courses require reliable mail delivery systems, while courses taught on the radio require radio stations, electricity, and radios in homes. Learning via television, through magazines, newspapers, or video recordings all require technological mediums, or media. When meeting together is not possible there are still many ways to bridge the distance between teachers and students.

The highly advanced internet and communications technologies (ICTs) currently available make distance learning more interactive, more immediate, and richer than ever before (Kentnor, 2015). Since the COVID-19 pandemic requires teachers and students to remain at a distance, all forms of distance learning are currently being re-examined, employed, and improved.

1.2 Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has interrupted education systems locally and globally. On March 13th, 2020, the Education Minister of Manitoba announced the suspension of classes, making Friday, March 20th the final day that children could attend school. Suspending classes on short notice led to tremendous efforts from the LRSD to find alternative ways for children to learn from home. Bridging the distance between teachers and students became known as "remote learning", since the term "distance learning" was already used to identify specific courses and

curricula from Manitoba Education. Remote learning is a rather more generic term, indicating only that the teacher and student are physically remote from one another. Remote learning practice grew incredibly in the LRSD during the first few weeks of the pandemic, strengthened by the expertise of many LRSD teachers who had been using various forms of remote learning for many years, and who were willing to share their expertise (Educational Continuance, 2020).

1.3 Problem Statement and Statement of Purpose

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced children and teachers into their homes, making remote learning the only option for continuing a child's formal education. If children are to remain connected with a teacher, a curriculum, a class of peers, and the networked support of an education system, then remote learning practices will certainly have to grow. The purpose of this report is to identify effective teacher practices, or best practices, in remote learning situations within the scope of the LRSD. The report also serves to identify a group of LRSD teachers with expertise in remote learning, and briefly examines the software and the pedagogies they employ while conducting remote learning.

1.4 Research Question

The initial task-stem for this report proposed a literature review of remote learning best practices (Personal Communication, Anderson). After consulting Jeff Anderson and Clarke Hagan (Personal Communication, Hagan), the scope of the project was clarified and the research question emerged: *What are some identifiable best practices in K-12 remote learning, and what evidence is there of remote learning best practices being employed in the LRSD?*

1.5 Research Parameters: Breadth and Depth

The research for this report took place between June 10th and 26th, 2020. Publicly available online resources were used along with published works from educational researchers of

note. Section 2 of this report provides a brief survey of remote learning best practices from

published sources. Section 3 of this report is built on the submissions of LRSD teachers. A call

for verbal and/or written submissions was emailed to 14 LRSD teachers on June 18 (Appendix

B) and 7 teachers participated. The short interviews with teachers were not recorded, but notes

were taken to provide detail for the vignettes in Section 3. In total, 6 written submissions and 5

interviews were received from LRSD teachers as the data set for this report. The teachers were

made aware that they would not be anonymous in this report. The intention in naming teachers is

to help identify local expertise in remote learning, so that best practices can be shared and

adopted more easily as remote learning grows.

Section 2: A selection of remote learning best practice documents

There are many versions of best practices in remote learning. A simple Google search

returns thousands of options for lists, strategies, and protocols for remote learning. What follows

are descriptions of a few selected remote learning best practices from reputable sources.

Examples of remote learning best practices for young children, for teens, and for students with

specialized educational programming are provided. Remote learning best practices should be as

varied and inclusive as the student populations they address; the sources mentioned here are only

a starting point for teachers who wish to explore remote learning pedagogies which best fit their

students and their remote learning situations.

2.1 ISTE

The International Society for Technology in education (ISTE) is a not-for-profit

organization which has encouraged the powerful use of ICTs in education since it began in 1979

(ISTE Story). As personal computing technologies grew, ISTE also transformed into a massive

on-line community of over 100,000 educators, intent on leveraging ICTs to increase student

learning and engagement (Company Profile). Over the years ISTE has developed many best

practice tools and protocols for remote learning which are well documented and field-tested. This

positioned them to respond to the needs of teachers as COVID-19 forced a massive shift to

emergency forms of remote learning.

As COVID-19 was beginning to close schools across the globe, ISTE responded with

"10 strategies for online learning during a coronavirus outbreak", published on March 16, 2020

(Snelling & Fingal). This article is an excellent starting point for practical wisdom and best

practices. The ten strategies are divided into two parts: "Prepare and Practice" for the first five,

"Implementation" for the last five. ISTE put digital equity at the top of the list, pointing out that

a digital divide between those with and those without ICTs at home posed a huge problem for the

widespread adoption remote learning. Beyond this system-wide challenge, practical tips on being

prepared to leave school, what to take, and how to establish routines with students in remote

learning environments are included. Student mental health and well-being is also included in this

short and powerful set of remote learning best practices.

A much larger hub of ISTE resources for on-line learning is also available (Online

Learning). This webpage is an index of articles that is frequently updated, and currently many

articles about remote learning best practices are appearing on this index. If a teacher did not yet

have a network of colleagues who were involved in remote learning, this index would quickly

provide many helpful practices and protocols. Also, since the index is curated by ISTE, there is a

higher degree of quality control for the information than one would find in forums where the

merit of user generated content is harder to determine.

2.2 Australian examples

John Hattie was born in New Zealand, educated in Canada, and is currently a professor at the University of Melbourne. Hattie's *Visible Learning* (2009) is a famous and highly reputable study of educational research; his methods for pinpointing the effectiveness of teaching practices on learning are widely applied. In a brief video posted to Facebook by AITSL (April 5, 2020), Hattie summarizes a few of the main points of the new AITSL report entitled *What Works in Online/Distance Teaching and Learning?* (AITSL, 2020).

The AITSL report itself is a treasure-trove of helpful information. While designed to be viewed online, the print-friendly .pdf version is only 22 pages long, including 3 pages of excellent references for further research. The entire document is highly recommended. It was published about three months ago by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). Hattie has been the Chair of the AITSL board since 2014, and his current academic work is frequently interconnected with AITSL's publications.

As a brief example of the perspectives on remote learning offered by the AITSL report, the report cites and shares a diagram of remote learning considerations which is included on the next page (Figure 1), complete with the citation as referenced in the AITSL report (Adapted from Picciano, 2017, p.182). Notice the wide variety of remote learning connections, which offer many vectors and possibilities for the triangulation of assessment data, check-ins for community building, and the monitoring of individual student mental health and well-being. The AITSL report cites this visual model from the work of Anthony Picciano (2017) as a framework for the ideas that teachers and leaders will need to consider about remote learning best practices.

Content
(LMS, CMS, Media, Games)

Collaboration, Student Generated Content
(Wiki, Mobile Tech)

Reflection
(Blog, Journal)

Learning Community

Social, Emotional
(Face-To-Face Teaching, Tutoring, Advisement)

Self-Paced, Independent Study
(Adaptive Software)

Evaluation, Assessment
(Assignments, Learning Analytics)

Dialectic, Questioning
(Discussion Board)

Figure 1. Integrated Model of online/distance education (Adapted from Picciano, 2017, p182).

The AITSL report is designed to be a practical document, and it is also well anchored to robust pedagogy and learning theories as well. Picciano's (2017) work dives deeper into a variety of learning theories, including behaviorism, cognitivism, social constructivism and connectivism in order to seek a common framework or theory of remote learning. So, the AITSL work is more practical, while the Picciano (2017) paper is more theoretical.

Yet another new source of information on remote learning best practices with connections to John Hattie is a new book entitled *The Distance Learning Playbook* (Fisher, Frey,

Hattie: Forthcoming). Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey have authored many education titles together, and in this case they team up with Hattie. This book has potential as an excellent source of information, since it relies on the work of credible experts, and has been written to address teachers as the pandemic continues. The brief excerpt provided by the publisher includes a portion of the introduction, which clearly hints at the language of Mehta & Fine (2019) regarding the "grammar of schooling", and points out that the first several weeks of teaching online during the pandemic were not well crafted distance learning, but a form of crisis teaching (Fisher, Frey, Hattie: Forthcoming).

In *Visible Learning*, (2009) Hattie shows that the effect sizes of technology and the internet on learning are quite small, which is a problem for authors wanting to ground a guidebook for remote learning on Hattie's work. In the Introduction, Fisher, Frey & Hattie address this problem:

> This brings us to the effect size of distance learning itself. We know the effect size of technology remains low and has been so for the last fifty years. As Dylan Wiliam has often said, technology is the revolution that is still coming! The effect of distance learning is small (0.14) but that does not mean it is NOT effective—it means it does not matter whether teachers undertake teaching in situ or from a distance over the internet (or, like when John started in his first university, via the post office). What we do matters, not the medium of doing it. (Fisher, Frey & Hattie: Forthcoming).

So, while the effect size of distance learning is small, it can be effective, and since other options are not possible due to COVID-19, it is the most effective option available. A further review of this forthcoming book may show that it is an excellent reference to put into the hands of teachers who are trying to do the best they can to learn remote learning best practices in a hurry.

2.3 Teaching younger students

There is no consensus about how much screen-based remote learning ought to be expected or required of young children. COVID-19 has increased screen-based learning for children at every age, but finding the balance is challenging. Melanie Muskin (2020) is the education director of a preschool that has a focus on play-based education. Her article explains that finding a balance between short, 30 minute sessions of screen time alongside activities that children can do at home with their families is a beneficial way to conduct remote learning for young children. The seven points in the article sum up a model of best practices for remote learning with young children: 1. Let the children guide you 2. Provide meaningful alternatives to screen time 3. Remember that families are your partners 4. Remote relationship-building is critical 5. Music is magical 6. Leverage your tech-savvy team members 7. Be kind to yourself (Muskin, 2020). Younger children simply need more support from adults, and it is unrealistic to expect young children to spend several hours a day in remote learning. Young children benefit from short sessions of synchronous online instruction that set up activities they can work on in their homes, and away from the screens.

Dr. Deborah Price is a senior lecturer in Inclusive Education at the University of South Australia, and the president of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association. She was interviewed by Rebecca Vukovic (2020) for an article published online by the Australian Council for Educational Research. In the article, Dr. Price identifies and explains many remote learning best practices for young children, including a move towards educating in natural settings and the outdoors. She cautions against the tendency to focus on the software instead of the learning and the pedagogy. She also encourages a wide range of activities off-screen to enhance the on-screen portions of remote learning.

Remote learning certainly can benefit even the youngest of children. They benefit from interacting with their friends and classmates on screen, singing together in virtual choirs, and by seeing the teachers they know and love who are helping them to learn and grow. Teachers have an important role to play in content creation and delivery, but for the most part, the success of remote learning with young children depends upon the level of support from the families at home.

2.4 Teaching older students

Harvard University has developed a practical webpage of considerations and best practices for remote learning (Harvard, 2020). The advice is aimed at those teaching and attending university courses, but it applies equally well to high school teachers. The webpage is very straightforward and provides additional links to further resources that teachers may find helpful. The webpage points out that teachers need to consider their pedagogy over their platform when teaching remotely. A platform, such as a LMS, or a branded form of video-conference software, should not take over the focus of the course.

Closer to home, Manitoba Education provides many courses and resources through the K-12 Distance Learning Unit (Manitoba Education). COVID-19 has increased the need for high quality remote learning options that can replace entire courses in high school, and Manitoba Education has responded by adopting a new and improved LMS, called Brightspace. All Manitoba teachers can sign up to have access to distance education courses from Manitoba Education. This is a valuable resource for teachers interested in seeing how an entire course can be structured for remote learning, and for finding content that aligns with Manitoba curricula for each course.

2.5 Inclusion and remote learning

UNESCO's GEM report on inclusion in education has been years in the making, and was released a few days ago, on June 23 (UNESCO). The report sounds the alarm that COVID-19 is likely to further marginalize students who were already disadvantaged educationally for the full spectrum of reasons that cause exclusion from education. Finding ways to include all students was very challenging even before COVID-19, but sadly, the challenge is even greater now. The Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, makes this clear in the Foreword to the report:

> In the face of these challenges, the messages of the 2020 GEM Report on inclusion in education are even more poignant. It warns that education opportunities continue to be unequally distributed. Barriers to quality education are still too high for too many learners. Even before Covid-19, one in five children, adolescents and youth were entirely excluded from education. Stigma, stereotypes and discrimination mean millions more are further alienated inside classrooms.
> The current crisis will further perpetuate these different forms of exclusion. With more than 90 per cent of the global student population affected by Covid-19 related school closures, the world is in the throes of the most unprecedented disruption in the history of education. Social and digital divides have put the most disadvantaged at risk of learning losses and dropping out. Lessons from the past – such as with Ebola – have shown that health crises can leave many behind, in particular the poorest girls, many of whom may never return to school. (UNESCO, p. 7).

Students with learning differences who need completely unique learning plans can too easily be excluded from remote learning. Finding ways to include all learners is challenging, but not impossible. Christina Cipriano and Gabrielle Rappolt-Schlichtmann (June 4, 12, 25, 2020) have published three recent articles about how to include learners with unique educational programs when all learning has to be done from a distance.

In the June 4 article, Cipriano and Rappolt-Schlichtmann frame the problem of service delivery to learners and families who have unique learning needs and programs. The grassroots organizing and networking within the disabilities community is also highlighted as a strength to aid continued service during COVID-19. The current crisis requires a re-framing of the services

provided by education professionals; new skills and new tasks will develop as teachers and

specialists advocate for the kinds of resources their learners and families will need. The article

argues that a focus on social-emotional learning (SEL) is a helpful way forward for now.

      The June 12 article further examines the problem of inaccessibility to remote learning

platforms for students with unique educational programs. Partial solutions are explored,

including an emphasis on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and a greater degree of

empathy, as learners and families do what they can with the resources that they can access. The

over-arching theme of promoting SEL is also sustained from the previous article.

      The June 25 article recognizes that a rapidly changing crisis leads to rapidly changing

rules and requirements, which is overwhelming. Coping strategies are provided for re-focussing

on student-centred responses to the shifting demands and requirements of educational systems

and health authorities. Finding the balance between continuing with remote learning without

damaging a student's mental health and well being is also discussed. Taken together, the three

articles address the massive challenges facing learners, families, and teachers as they try to

maintain services for students with unique learning programs. The three articles do provide

starting points for practical action, while recognizing the enormity of the challenges ahead.

      In the face of these incredible challenges, UNESCO has also published an index of

distance learning solutions that can aid in crafting remote learning options for a wide range of

students in various contexts (Distance Learning Solutions). The list is helpful and includes

software tools, best practices, and networks of teachers and learners who have already been

working remotely for years. Sometimes the best way to learn new things is by asking people who

are doing things well, and who are happy to share what they have learned along the way. The

importance of finding a local professional learning network (PLN) is the focus of Section 3, with

a focus on LRSD teachers who are engaging in many forms of remote learning with many

different learner populations. Learning from each other within the LRSD could help with the

dissemination and uptake of many remote learning best practices.

Section 3: Vignettes of remote learning practice in the LRSD

3.1 Many teachers, many practices: The power of a PLN

Many teachers in the LRSD have years of experience teaching in remote learning

environments, and many of them are willing to share their expertise and enthusiasm for

leveraging student learning with ICTs. The LRSD EdTech Mentorship program (LRSD News,

Jan 18, 2018) has further shaped and amplified the capacities of some teachers, casting them as

peer mentors who are willing to come alongside colleagues who are new to teaching with ICTs.

In some cases, the very high quality of work done by LRSD EdTech Mentors has received

national recognition (Chopek, M.) (Speiser, G.). While PLNs can include people from around the

planet, having local teachers who are approachable and knowledgeable is very helpful.

For this study, 14 LRSD teachers received an email (Appendix B) asking for verbal or

written submissions about their experiences and history with remote learning best practices,

particularly in connection to the suite of Microsoft products that are used within the LRSD. The

vignettes that follow are ordered alphabetically by surname. Software names are in bold, for easy

identification. For example, this report was created using **Word**. The 7 teachers who contributed

each have a vignette, but all 14 teachers contacted could be helpful resources for local

information about ICTs and remote learning.

3.1.1 Thaddeus Bourassa

Thaddeus is an itinerant teacher on the LRSD learning team, completing his second year in this role. Thad has experience and training in using ICTs in educational settings, he holds a Microsoft Innovative Educator Expert (MIEE) designation, and he is a LRSD EdTech Mentor. His best practices in remote learning come from his classroom experiences with grade 5 and 6 students, working in blended learning classrooms. Thad has been finding meaningful ways to use technology with students for about ten years, beginning in 2010, when he began asking students to use USB memory sticks to sort and order their own work into early versions of digital portfolios.

Thad's uptake of purposeful Ed Tech increased greatly as he got to know Warren Hart, who was then a teacher at Niakwa Place School. Warren's early practice and digital sharing on social media platforms served as a model for Thad, and since they both worked for the LRSD it was easy enough to collaborate. Together to two of them attended the 2018 ISTE conference in Chicago, which further inspired and convinced Thad that the suite of Microsoft educational tools on offer had the potential to be transformational for students and teachers.

Most recently, Thad presented many LRSD DPDF Ed Tech sessions held on **Teams**, and he is co-presenting with Warren at the ConnectEd virtual education conference to be held on Monday, June 29th [(ConnectEd)](ConnectEd).

3.1.2 Warren Hart

Warren Hart is currently an itinerant teacher on the LRSD Learning Team. He has years of experience as a music educator and band teacher who has now transformed into a **Skype** master teacher, a MIE Expert, and one of the very earliest teachers using **Teams** in the LRSD. Warren became aware that **Teams** was available in 2018, and advocated for using it with a

middle-years history class he was teaching. So, his class began experimenting with using **Teams** as a way to organize the class, message one another, and share information about the course. It is important to note that Warren and his class never once used the video-conferencing features available in **Teams**, because they were able to meet face to face. Warren found that **Teams** was an excellent way to organise and collaborate in a blended learning environment, which is also the case when **Teams** is utilized for remote learning.

Warren has been able to harness **Skype** to help middle-years students learn about **3D Paint** from older students in Poland. International collaboration becomes possible with remote learning, and the possibilities to visit many lands, cultures, and world-class museums is made possible with **Skype**. Like Thad, Warren has recently presented many LRSD DPDF Ed Tech sessions held on **Teams**, and he is co-presenting with Thad at the ConnectEd virtual education conference to be held on Monday, June 29th (ConnectEd).

3.1.3 Robert Hrabluk

Robert is an itinerant middle-years music teacher based at Island Lakes School. He is a thoughtful and enthusiastic champion for using **Teams**, **Flipgrid**, **Word, Stream** and **OneNote** with students to increase engagement and provide differentiated learning choices for students. Robert is also working to complete a master's thesis on the topic of distance education, which helps to explain the depth of his understanding of the subject.

In his written submission (Appendix A), Robert focusses on the possibilities for enhanced inclusion, accessibility, and differentiation that become possible for students when using the Microsoft suite of educational software tools. The visual model he has created helps to point out that the tools work well together; they are not stand-alone software programs, but rather a set of integrated software systems that allow for increased group learning.

Robert's experiences using many Microsoft tools in an integrated fashion are some of the ways that his remote learning best practices have developed far beyond those of an average user. Furthermore, his willingness to share what he is learning, and the energy he puts into his own studies show that he has much to offer other teachers who wish to learn more about remote learning best practices.

3.1.4 Erin Kabez

Erin Kabez is a high school math and science teacher at Glenlawn Collegiate. Her students benefit from her experiences in the LRSD and other urban school divisions in Winnipeg during the past seven years. Seeing the ways that other school divisions use technology with teachers and students has made Erin a quick study when it comes to the adoption of new tech in schools. Having a variety of experiences also allows Erin to make interesting comparisons between school divisions and the software systems that they ask teachers to employ.

When classes were suspended in March, Erin signed up for the LRSD DPDF sessions that would help her to re-tool for remote learning with her GCI students. She learned about **Whiteboard**, got additional training in **Teams**, and began to experiment with the use of her own personal Microsoft Surface alongside the devices provided by the LRSD. During our interview she was emphatic about how the Microsoft suite was superior to other software systems she had experienced in recent years. Erin noted that the ability to link programs together to create functionality for students using multiple programs at once was better with Microsoft than other platforms she had previously used.

Using **Whiteboard** on a Surface became very much like using a document camera in a classroom, which was a mode of instruction that Erin's students appreciated and understood. Erin's skills in finding ways to take the best of classroom practices and emulating them in remote

learning environments, and her willingness to troubleshoot problems in the LRSD Educator's

Teams channel set her apart as a teacher demonstrating some of the best practices to enhance

remote learning.

3.1.5 Mark Lesiuk

Mark is a Grade 5 and 6 teacher at Highbury School with several years of Ed Tech

experience. Going back to 2016, Mark saw ways to include **Minecraft** in his classes, making

connections to some of the math curriculum, along with the social studies content covering the

First Peoples and New France. As an enthusiastic teacher who understands the value of

Minecraft for learning, Mark has shared his experiences in PD sessions with LRSD teachers.

When COVID-19 led to the suspension of classes in Manitoba, Mark was able to take the

good start that he had with **OneNote** and expand his practice to include **Teams**. While he

appreciates the ways that **Teams** and **OneNote** can work together, he was particularly impressed

with the ways that **Minecraft** and **Teams** can be integrated. By using the two together, Mark can

navigate **Minecraft** worlds while also collaborating out-loud with students in real time via

Teams.

Initially Mark was worried that there could be an issue with the **Minecraft** servers or

internet bandwidth not being able to keep up, but none of these concerns were ever a problem.

The set-up ran well from Mark's home, on his wireless network connected to his personal

internet service provider.

Making the transition from teaching at school to teaching from home became far more

"seamless" with **Teams**. However, Mark was clear that even though remote learning works, it is

far more fun for everyone to be learning together, all in one classroom at school. Mark's

optimistic attitude during a challenging time is evidence of a set of best practices having to do

with tenacity, curiosity, and a willingness to troubleshoot to find solutions when problems arise. Mark's remote learning best practices include taking an energetic, problem-solving stance toward the task of learning from a distance.

3.1.6 Dennis Nguyen

Dennis has a very unique position as a "Literacy Academics and Language" (LAL) teacher at Windsor Park Collegiate. There are 24 students in the class, ranging in age from 14 to 21. About half of the class is 18 or older. All students are new to Canada and have significant gaps in their formal education. Many have little to no knowledge of English when they arrive, and Dennis has to start classes by teaching the alphabet, sight words, consonants, vowels, and basic conversational English for shopping, riding the bus, and trying to find employment.

Immersive Reader and **Translate** are important software tools in Dennis's LAL class, but with the suspension of classes, Dennis had to improvise. How could he reach students online who were not yet skilled even in the basics of using a web browser or an email address? Fortunately for his students, Dennis is an early adopter of new technologies, and a majority of his in-class resources are things that he has created and stored in **OneDrive**.

To solve the problem of finding a simple and highly visual way to communicate with his students, Dennis used Microsoft **AppSource** to find **ThingLink**. The advantage of using **ThingLink** to create interactive digital posters for his students is that **Thinglink** has **Immersive Reader** built in, and that it also integrates with **Teams**. During our video interview for this paper, Dennis also demonstrated how the posters work, and he generously permitted me to include two links to his interactive digital posters about "Remote Learning 2020" (Nguyen) and "Group Norms" (Nguyen). The links can be found in the references for this paper.

Even with the incredible challenges of finding computers, learning new software, creating new content for students and many, many phone calls to families, Dennis had success engaging his LAL learners in remote learning. By his tally, 21 of 24 students in his class engaged in remote learning during the suspension of classes. One noteworthy class management practice that he employed was to divide his group of 24 into three classes of 8 students each, which made it easier to conduct meetings online. It also tripled the number of meetings, which speaks to his willingness to do everything he could for his students during this incredibly challenging time. Even so, Dennis is happy with the online LAL classes and the online community that they have been able to sustain. Dennis certainly has wisdom to offer when it comes to finding ways to include and engage a very wide variety of learners in remote learning.

3.1.7 Wendy Wakeman

Wendy teaches Grade 4 and 5 students at General Vanier School. In her written submission she captured something of the speed and urgency that so many teachers and students felt at the end of March, as classes were suspended yet school was to continue online via remote learning. The chat function in **Teams** became a helpful and immediate way for students and teachers to share timely information in order to set up online classes quickly.

After the initial chaotic flurry of activity to create and manage online class environments, the shift to using the virtual space started to happen. Wendy notes that:

> Once assignments started to build momentum, students learned how to access the resources, download and upload assignments. Students could manage these areas themselves and seek out support when encountering issues. Of course, the whole class meetings (were) an incredible way to do collaborative problem solving, discuss projects on the go, and touch base with the class all together.

Using **Teams** to have whole class meetings was new for almost all of the teachers in the LRSD, and Wendy recognized the powerful ways that it makes remote learning more possible, by quite literally putting human faces on the conversations, the assignments, and the sharing of ideas.

Wendy found **Whiteboard**, **Polls**, and **Insights** to be helpful for keeping parents connected to the process of remote learning. **Insights** helped her to understand how and when students were connecting online, so she could better manage a reasonable workflow during a challenging public health crisis. Wendy was also active in the LRSD Educators **Teams** channel, connecting with many colleagues as they learned about remote learning together, and quickly.

3.2 Final thoughts

Thinking about best practices in remote learning tends to draw one towards the technical; learning about software, understanding how programs can work together, and creating secure digital classrooms. But there are other kinds of best practices, such as setting group norms, regularly contacting students, listening carefully, and being kind to one another, that are also remote learning best practices. These also need to continue, simply because they are also the best practices of caring and professional teachers no matter where or how the learning is happening.

The routines and rituals of school life, such as getting to school, finding friends on the school grounds, hanging up our coats, finding our desks, and partaking in the opening ceremonies are all lost in remote learning environments. More should be done to find ways to create these routines and rituals of schooling if remote learning is ever to feel more social, more inclusive, and more universal.

Within the LRSD, the current work of the EdTech Mentorship program regarding assistive technologies is fertile ground for further study of remote learning best practices while also promoting inclusive education (LRSD News, Jan 24, 2020). So much work has yet to be

done, and this EdTech Mentorship project, conceived before the onset of COVID-19, could be very helpful as all school divisions have to bridge the distance to continue educating students with unique learning programs.

One part of the current success of remote learning within the LRSD can be traced back to work done three years ago, with the creation of the EdTech Mentorship program (LRSD News, Jan 18, 2018). Many of the teacher-leaders who have participated in that program have become key figures in sustaining and growing Ed Tech capacity in the LRSD up to the present. Having good software is critical, along with good hardware, and good infrastructure. Yet none of it amounts to anything without enthusiastic teachers who are willing to take on the challenge of learning new things.

Remote learning provides ways to bridge the distance between teachers and students, and also between the children, who usually benefit from being all together in one place. Beating COVID-19 requires that people isolate from each other much more than most would like. And, sustained isolation grinds away at a person's well being. Even when the very best of "best practices" are in place, and the technological bridges are working well, there is nothing that can ever replace the deep and sustaining human bonds that people form in the company of one another. One way to understand the toll of isolation on students is to view *Numb – A short film*, created by a 15 year old Ontario student, Liv McNeil (June 17, 2020). Liv's film captures the numbing, distressing, and potentially damaging effects of isolation on children. May teachers of all kinds remember that even if remote learning is going very well, that it cannot replace the richness of people learning together in the moment, and in the company of one another.

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Appendix A: Written submission from Robert Hrabluk

Distance Learning Using Microsoft Teams

My Background

My name is Robert Hrabluk and I live in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. For the past eighteen years, I have been an itinerant middle year's music teacher in Louis Riel School Division. In addition to teaching music, my role has encompassed classroom subject areas and other arts programming at various levels from kindergarten to high school. I am currently working on a master's thesis in Distance Education centered on how private music teachers facilitate learning when teaching online. I designed the diagram below to showcase how I think about Teams integration.

Inclusion

Prior to distance or remote learning, Louis Riel School Division made the choice to integrate with the Microsoft suite of programs and make licenses available to staff and students free of charge. This was largely designed around providing inclusive capabilities so everyone could gain access to Office 365 (now Microsoft 365) at work, home, and on their mobile devices. During this remote learning phase, Louis Riel School Division sought to deliver school laptops to any family who did not have a device to work on from home and pay for internet costs for families without prior access. This phase highlighted the importance of integrating a remote learning system that could be inclusive to all staff and students. This concept of integrated inclusion became amplified with the introduction of the Teams platform. In my view, Microsoft Teams is best described as an inclusive hub where teamwork of any type can flourish and creativity can be represented by individuals designing, implementing, and completing tasks. Teams provides my music students with an opportunity to collaborate on projects using the shared Teams Files section, the Teams integrated OneNote Collaboration Space, and the Teams Chat functions both one-on-one and in our Group Chat Channel. Students can also insert audio or video clips into their collaborative or individual OneNote pages, which helps both students and I reach new heights of creativity. The Teams phone app is an excellent resource for on-the-go learning and has nearly the same functionality as the desktop/web version. This allows students to have choice between how and where they access Teams.

Teams OneNote can aid students designated English as an Additional Language (EAL). The Speech to Text Dictate Feature, the built-in Immersive Reader function, and the translate option, allow students who may be learning the English language to find familiarity by beginning with their first language. They can initially learn via these means, and slowly transition to using

an enhanced English vocabulary. Further to this, combining the use of Office Lens with OneNote, makes it easy to share photographs of objects that can enhance the learning of a language. The incorporation of photos into OneNote has become a great way for students to share learning and further develop vocabulary. One feature that I would like to see built into Teams OneNote is the ability to mass assign a color to a folder tab from the Content Library section. I have many students that associate the color of a folder with the task at hand, so I like the folder tabs to color match for all students. Currently, I need to access each student's folder and change the color manually. However, OneNote's Check Accessibility function ensures that I am always providing the most inclusive and accessible materials possible. Many of these features transfer over to multiple apps in the Microsoft suite, making for seamless educational tools that serve to assist all types of learning styles, behaviors, environments, and cultures.

Accessibility

Teams makes it quite simple to access teacher exemplars. If I need to provide samples of work to students, I achieve this through using the read-only OneNote Content Library or the read-only Class Materials folder in Teams Files. The creation of a Teams Class Notebook has never been simpler because the groundwork in creating the OneNote Notebook is done for you when your Team is created. This provides more time for me to focus on how I want the student's OneNote pages and folders to look when they view the assignments. I also attach read-only document examples for students when creating an Assignment in the integrated Assignments Section of Teams. The Assignments section is very user friendly and great for teachers who need to catch a quick glance of who has viewed or completed the assignment. Adding rubrics to the assignment allows for further integration of a complete virtual classroom experience. This all leads to having a Grades tab where an ongoing record of student marks can be stored for safe

keeping throughout the term or semester. For a further snapshot or more in-depth view into student engagement in Teams, I have populated the Insights tab on top of my General Channel, which allows me access to how students are utilizing the Teams platform in an on-going basis.

Staff and student class meetings are another great function within Teams. Whether it be in the form of booking a meeting or directly calling staff, Teams has made it simple to discuss student engagement and manage technological integration within the virtual classroom. I can easily share files with other teachers right within the call and not have to go outside the Teams interface to do so. Whether we are just sharing a document for a viewing purpose or collaborating on a live Word Online document, Teams is seamless as a platform. Booking student meetings are another great feature I use on a consistent basis. Whether I am inviting my entire Teams Channel at once or interweaving the meeting invitations through my Outlook calendar, both create a user-friendly experience regardless of the computer or device that I am accessing.

Being able to record your meetings directly in Teams and have it saved in Microsoft Stream allows for accessibility to direct lesson teaching and professional development learning. Teaching private and small group music lessons in Teams has been a great method for keeping up with where students are at. I have also recorded all or small portions of a lesson to provide the students with a melodic or rhythmic example after the lesson ends. This has proved to be a tremendous resource and is not always something that can occur in a busy traditional classroom setting. Since the inception of distance learning, I have organized two companywide meetings for music teachers and utilized the recording feature. This has allowed for teachers to view the video and refresh a concept or watch the entire meeting if they could not attend. I have also recorded lessons ahead of a meeting with students by booking a meeting with myself and then

recording my desktop. This way students can preview what we will be learning in a meeting. This idea leads us in the direction of a flipped classroom, where teachers and students are sharing information about topics and it is not always about placing the teacher in the role of expert. This concept of flipped classroom is well represented in the Microsoft world by their app called Flipgrid.

Differentiation

Flipgrid provides a vehicle for student learning and differentiation within that learning. I like to post open-ended musical topics such as Songs of Inspiration or Songs of Comfort, where the general purpose is to watch my video introduction and then have the student post their own video response to me. It has proven great with shy students because Flipgrid has an optional Moderated Topic feature, which allows for the student's video response to only be shared with me. Some students may want to be seen, while others will not but overall, more will respond by providing open-ended topics that encompass student choice and value student voice. Flipgrid makes it easy for student response by allowing app integration right from the student's phone. From an educator perspective, Flipgrid has been a fun incorporation into the virtual classroom and I even earned my Level 2 Certified Flipgrid Educator badge. The ability of students and teachers to respond to one another provides built-in motivation for both entities.

Being able to customize the way your Teams Channel looks is an excellent feature. As an example, I chose to add my Flipgrid, Stream, and personal website to the top of my Teams tabs. This builds in an integration piece for students, a one-stop shop for accessing all the platforms that they will require to experience success. I like to use the Class Material > Files section to house a repository of music materials that students can draw on at any time from home. Students can incorporate these materials into their Assignment, Flipgrid, OneNote, or Teams Meeting. In

many cases, having this File Repository to access saves the planet a little as students can read the materials right from a device and there is no need to print the page out. I also opted to add a live Word Online document outside of the Class Materials folder for students to be able to sign up for virtual music lessons. This helps to organize and provide a collaborative structure between the students and myself.

Concluding Thoughts:

In my opinion, Teams speaks with integration and collaboration in mind. This is all bundled within a platform that supports inclusive, accessible, and differentiated learning. The ability to incorporate many Microsoft Apps directly within Teams provides both the educator and the student with an expansive and colorful array of choices to enhance learning and knowledge. The language translation integration, along with dictation, and immersive reader functions allow educators to start where the student will feel most comfortable and work from there. The apps are built with both the framework of the teacher in mind as well as what will be best practice for each individual student moving forward. Even when the distance learning period in the public-school sector is over, Teams will remain a tremendous asset to my teaching and my student's learning by way of providing a comfortable hub to share, communicate and assess.

Sincerely,

Robert Hrabluk

Robert Hrabluk

Appendix B: Email to teachers- call for submissions

From:	Roy Norris
To:	Kimberley Adair-Gagnon; Thaddeus Bourassa; Diane Burke; Erin Charles; Lea Funk; Warren Hart; Robert Hrabluk; Erin Kabez; Mark Lesiuk; Tyler Muntain; Wendy Narozniak; Brad Nechwediuk; Dennis Nguyen; Wendy Wakeman
Cc:	Jeff Anderson; Darcy Cormack
Subject:	An opportunity to share your experience
Date:	Thursday, June 18, 2020 3:04:00 PM

Hello LRSD teachers,

Would you be willing to share your story of remote learning?

My name is Roy Norris, and I'm a teacher/researcher with the LRSD Learning Team.

Part of my job right now is to **research and write about best-practices for remote learning**. I'm emailing you because I noticed that you have posted helpful questions, tips, and tricks on the LRSD Educators TEAMS site. Since you've been awesome there, I am hoping that you can help me out.

In particular, I'm looking to learn more about your **best-practices with Microsoft TEAMS, O365, Minecraft, MySite class sites, and Skype in the classroom.**

If you are willing to share your stories and experiences you could:
-**Write me a long email**, (write about 200-400 words, give or take) and tell me your top stories about your remote learning best-practices here in the LRSD.
or
-**Invite me to a short TEAMS meeting** (maybe 30 minutes?) and we could talk about it.

Here are a few Questions that you might have:

1. **Do I have to do this?**
   A: No, this is totally voluntary. You can delete this email right now if you want.
2. **Who might read the things I share?**
   A: I will read what you share, write them up into a research paper, and give it to Jeff Anderson and Darcy Cormack, the Principals of the Learning Team. They will share it with other school and LRSD divisional leaders. It is also possible that the paper could be shared beyond the LRSD, as a paper highlighting best-practices in remote learning.
3. **Will my name be shared along with what I write?**

A: Yes, you will be identified by name as a teacher with experience and ability, doing high- quality work. I want to have a way to share best-practices and local expertise, names and all.

4. **If I do this, when do you need it?**

A: The sooner the better. Today would be great if you have the time . If you would like to share your best practices, your final deadline is Wednesday, June 24.

5. **Why did you send this email to me?**

A: You have posted helpful questions, tips and tricks on the LRSD Educators TEAMS site. Since you've been awesome there, I am hoping that you can help me out.

There are 14 teachers getting this email; check the "To" list at the top if you want to see who else might be helping out. In the "Cc" line you'll see that I've sent a copy to Jeff Anderson and Darcy Cormack since they are my supervisors. Finally, I've also been in contact with Greg Kiesman and Clarke Hagan, so they too are aware of this small research project that the LRSD has asked me to do.

I know that the research I'm doing will be way better with your voices than without.

Basically, I'm hoping you'll be willing to share some of the **awesomeness** that is coming out of this weird and wild time in education.

Thanks for reading right to the end!
(Drop me a line if you have any questions too)

Your colleague in teaching and learning,

Dr. Roy Norris

Itinerant Teacher

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