Digital Leadership in Times of 'The New Normal'

Article contributed by Dr. Maggie Koong, Head of Academy

Since I last wrote to you all, the phrase 'the new normal' has become commonplace. For most, this simply means a post-Covid return to how we live our daily lives, free from the constraints imposed upon us by outside factors beyond our control.

For those of us privileged to work in the field of education, the phrase carries a far more profound meaning. We accept that change is a constant and brings with it not only new opportunities but also insecurity and challenges. However, we should be assured that education transforms the world and, as stated by UNESCO, "knowledge and learning are our greatest renewable resources for responding to challenges and creating alternatives."

Of course, for VSA, the purpose and practice of education is already future-oriented, we are here to embrace this learner-centred and forward-looking philosophy and methodology. Having agency for their own learning, which our curriculum and pedagogy enables for students, we are tailoring the educational experience for individual needs. Crucial for students in taking full advantage of this opportunity is to be able to use exponential technology to develop and use the creativity, collaboration, communication and critical thinking which are the required attributes to meet the demands of 'the new normal'.

I had the privilege of being a panellist at the UNESCO "Future of Education-For Industry 4.0 and Beyond" online forum on June 20, the purpose of which was to call the community's attention to identifying aspects of education that will support Industry 4.0 and Beyond. It was an invitation to collectively contribute to shaping the "Future of Education" for the next generation.
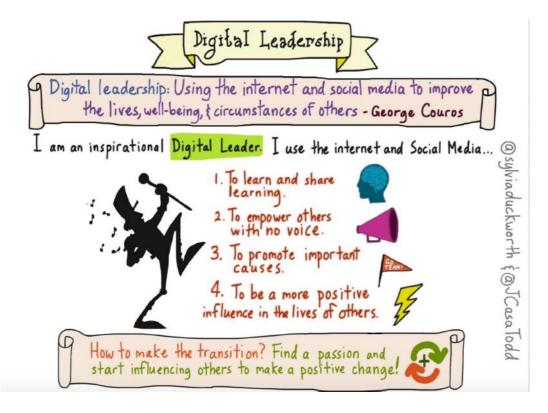
My contribution to meeting this challenge includes the matter of "Digital Leadership - Taking Agency of your Digital Use". Firstly, in my presentation, we explain the evolving role from digital citizenship to digital leadership. A digital citizen must be respectful, responsible, and accountable for their actions when using technology, including aspects of safety. When asked for her opinion on digital leadership, a Year 4 student interpreted it as someone actually using it, sharing opinions and taking charge. For the past few months, through virtual learning, it has been a great opportunity for promoting student agency and nurturing digital leaders who can competently and responsibly exercise voice, choice and ownership.

Some examples of digital leadership at VSA are:
- This year, we held the PYP Exhibition online and then students presented upon their return in June
- During iTime in Year 4, we designate two lessons per week for students to pursue their own interest, and teachers help them to connect with an outside mentor. For example, a student was able to an expert about volcanic eruption
- There is more sharing of students' opinions in Seesaw or Flip Grip, as students need to upload their work and opinions there
- We invited a famous child rights specialist to join a Zoom call with our students, which provoked more discussion than would a normal Zoom class
- One Year 4 student created a website using WIX to organise our weekly learning grid

- Our Primary Head Girl opened a blog 'Acting for Good', advocating for the UN Global Goals
- We are launching a Primary-wide podcast called 'DANYCast' where students will record conversations about things taking place in school amongst themselves and inviting guest speakers onto their show
- There is a Digital Leadership Team run by Secondary students that is a CAS club. The students in the group are passionate about coding and using technology to benefit the school. In previous years, they have helped to draft the Responsible Use Policy for Tech at VSA and have helped teachers develop the digital citizenship curriculum
- A group of Year 6 students formed the Tech Ninjas that teach other students about responsible use of mobile learning devices. They meet every week to learn coding apps, STEAM projects and other tech related subjects
- Some VSA teachers are active on online platforms in developing content to support other educators; Mr. Adam Hill's blog 'Mr Hill Musings', Ms. Katie Tollitt's online teaching tutorials for teachers, and Mr. Chris Gadbury's online art lessons are a few examples

I truly believe that, with the digital journey, we can see more benefits in independent learning as students become more responsible and accountable for their digital use, having more respectful exchange and open dialogue. Everyone learns how to value individual opinions, as all ideas matter and can be shared. We are also learning without borders, opening up space and location, as learning and sharing can now happen anywhere and anytime.

In this new era, we can no longer rely on the pedagogy of the past and assume that those ways will equip students with the necessary skills to work and adapt in the digital world. Please join all of us to equip students for their future, which begins by helping them become digital leaders.