EP 07 - Supporting Technological Education

Lawrence DeMaeyer [00:00:12]:
Hello everyone, and welcome to OPC's Leadership Talks podcast. My name is Lawrence DeMaeyer, Professional Learning Advisor at the OPC,

Susie Lee-Fernandes [00:00:21]:
And my name is Susie Lee-Fernandes, OPC's Director of Professional Learning.

Lawrence DeMaeyer [00:00:26]:
As co-hosts, we will engage school and system leaders in authentic conversations to explore their passions, experiences and expertise in k twelve education. OPC is proud to highlight the amazing work that principals and vice principals are doing across this province.

Susie Lee-Fernandes [00:00:44]:
We hope that leadership talks will not only provide you with inspiration, joy and valuable strategies that will inform your professional practice, but also enhance the learning and well being of those you serve. Enjoy. Hello everyone. Hi Lawrence, great to be with you again for another conversation. I'm looking forward to today's guest who's going to be speaking on a very popular topic today, technological education. So welcome Brent Coquille, thank you for joining us for this very relevant topic.

Brent Coakwell [00:01:19]:
Looking forward to sharing some of my background and also some of my passion on technological education in Ontario and how it can support our principals and our students and our system. A little bit about myself and my journey in public education. It's my 27th year. When I looked back at today and was reflecting on what brought me here today is I'm a former professional chef who became a technological education teacher back in 1990, 619 97 and I've worked now in my fourth school board across the province in a variety of roles from teacher to department head, vice principal and principal now for over ten years and have supported development of curriculum and projects like specialist high schools major and the development of that back in the mid two thousands to support our students in understanding and our schools understanding the value of technological education. One of the biggest things that why I thought this was an appropriate time to connect with my peers and share a little bit of my journey and that we can use to support principles in thinking about how technological education can support students in our schools is now the mandatory technological education credit that's been coming out and how this has benefited not only myself but many others out there in our journeys and

how this can benefit our schools going forward and some of the challenges that we'll face in implementing this mandate moving forward. My leadership journey has taken a couple of fronts over the years and evolved through the work and the mentorship of peers that I've had. I think it's really important as I come into this phase of my career that I'm able to share that with people that are charged with moving that forward and their schools and their communities. My passion around Tatalajal education was rooted very much in secondary school in Toronto.

Brent Coakwell [00:03:14]:
I went to Lakeshore Collegiate Institute that happened to have a food program back in the late 1980s, early 1990s. I was very, very fortunate to have a teacher there who was able to show me the connections and we didn't speak of them in the way we do now of STEM and how those things connect to learning and problem solving, but was able to allow me to enrol while I was still in high school in an apprenticeship and a skilled trade. Knowing now what we know as a system, as a school system, and as leaders, we know that these opportunities are not for everyone in our school system and in our schools, but they are for many. And how we open the pathways and the opportunities can very much change the lives of students in our schools and provide opportunities for success. So it's really with that mentorship that I've had from a very young age through my professional career, and finding mentors along the way that really allowed me to explore and take the skills from technological education and really put them to use throughout my career. What we do know and why we believe students should take technological education is it really builds self reliance and the understanding of themselves as well as their ability to understand the principles of STEM. We know that all of our technological education classrooms are cross curricular and allow students to explore and solve problems in different ways. And by this expansion and this task that we've been charged with as leaders in schools to implement this mandatory tech credit, it provides systemic challenges for us in sometimes facilities that aren't up to date or were never constructed in the schools that we're tasked with overseeing.

Brent Coakwell [00:05:06]:
But it also provides an ability for us to problem solve that and provide engaging and diverse opportunities for students to think about ways that they can think and engage with problem solving and the understanding of real world applications. It's through this and this value of perseverance that we can teach students and provide them with the opportunities to find their strengths and explore opportunities that we know will provide them with rewarding careers and occupations in our society and in our jurisdictions that will be able to allow them to educate themselves, support their families, and contribute to society as we move forward. We know that these jobs and we know better than what we used to. I remember being told in high school, because I wanted to be a chef, I had the aptitude to go to post-secondary at that time. But I remember being told very clearly from my guidance counsellor, because I wanted to be a tradesperson, that that was going to amount to me not going very far in life. I would argue that those biases that we intrinsically held at those times are shifting, and we need to work at that as school leaders, and that we're seeing the great value in the skilled trades and how much we do rely on them and how highly skilled they are and how much knowledge and understanding is needed within that.

Lawrence DeMaeyer [00:06:30]:
So, Brett, the benefits that you're pointing out to, you know, technological education, you know, are pretty clear, and you've obviously done a lot of thinking about this and work with it. But you, you're pointing out, I think there is a longstanding, if I, you know, can be so bold to suggest that there's a longstanding sort of bias both inside the education system and maybe outside parents and caregivers. How, as a school leader, are you working with staff to help them, you know, rethink their own biases about technological education? And maybe as a corollary or an addition, how are you kind of helping your community, your school community, like your parents and caregivers, to kind of rethink about this?

Brent Coakwell [00:07:17]:
I think one of the big things when we think about bias is really taking the opportunity to bring in people to have them share their stories. We know through many different opportunities that we can have students involved in, whether it be through competitions, through experiences, and bringing in highly skilled professionals to share, share their experiences, share that these jobs are not the jobs of the 1950s and the 1960s, where they're highly repetitive and what we would think of low wage earning. These are highly skilled, highly adaptable people who are, who are working in environments that are incredibly rewarding but also are very high paying. And sharing that notion of that. I think there's a notion out there that if you become a plumber or a cook or a millwright, that you're going to be doing something on an assembly line or an assembly line type fashion that is not viewed as highly skilled. When we look at the new materials that are being used and the processes that are involved in these positions and these trades, these are people that need to be adaptable. They need to be highly skilled, highly motivated people. They can be successful running their own businesses.

Brent Coakwell [00:08:46]:
And so really sharing those stories and having the community members come along and understand that they need to have degrees, they need to have college diplomas, and that the education is a journey. So sometimes it's just sharing that journey, that journey that I've gone through, finding other people that have lived experiences. When we think of other areas and other people sharing what that looks like, it's really finding those people that have been able to share that and also asking people to share their experiences on the other side, when you go and get that undergrad degree and we find out they have to go back and doing apprenticeship afterwards, and that education evolves, it now is evolving over a course of a lifetime. There is not one year in my career, and I look back at my career as being part of, partly as a chef, as a business owner, and now in education, that I haven't done learning and I'm not involved in learning and the ongoing learning of refining what that is in that journey. And so sharing that with families and bringing them along with that journey, I think also having them realise and see get out to some of these industries and engage with some of the work and the workers that are running them and having them understand that these are very, very highly skilled, that these courses and these jobs involve high tech numeracy, this notion of it's not just working in a textbook fashion in an office, but, but really engaging with clients, engaging with businesses, and really allowing their children to be very fulfilled in their roles. And so I think back to your

question, Lawrence, around how do we engage? This takes real, tangible work. It takes getting out in the community. We used to think of going out and visiting different schools, but how do we hold meetings? I've worked with schools to hold school council meetings in the local manufacturing office, in the local construction trade association office, and having them see what they do.

Brent Coakwell [00:11:01]:
Many parents have never experienced this. They see one small portion or a story that they were told with their experience, especially when you look at what that looks like. I do believe we're destigmatizing the trades as we've seen this over the last number of years, but there's a long way to go. I also think there's a disconnect in people thinking about technological education as seeing just working with computers. It's a tool that a lot of these courses use, but it's much greater than that. It's really based on a number of concepts that we can use to support learning in a very progressive, diverse way to allow many students to be very successful.

Susie Lee-Fernandes [00:11:41]:
Brent, I really love how your own story, too, is a great example of not the straight path. Right? You have a variety of experiences on your own, along your own journey. On the topic of that, is there advice you would give to educators and leaders? Because sometimes this area of technology can be really intimidating because we're all at different points in terms of our comfort and level of expertise. What advice do you have for responding to the challenges, the changes in technology, and the tools available to enhance education? What should our approach be as educators?

Brent Coakwell [00:12:16]:
My advice is similar advice that I had to myself. So I'm going to go back and reflect on a situation that I was dealing with as a young teacher. I was coming from an environment. I was a tradesperson. I spent one year at the faculty of education to become a teacher, and then I was in the classroom and I was in an environment that didn't feel very friendly to me. I was working with a lot of academics. I didn't see myself as an academic at that point in time in my career. I didn't have a degree.

Brent Coakwell [00:12:43]:
I had grade twelve and an apprenticeship, a certificate of apprenticeship and a certificate of qualification as a tradesperson. If we think back, just like we're working on the numeracy and how it's involved in our schools now, we're working on think literacy at that time. And what really had me get involved in that work was taking that leap. And I would give this advice now to people I'm working with is to go and play. And I went and played in that environment and I started taking some courses for general interest and that led to me then doing my undergrad and then my masters and that journey I would say to principals, school leaders, vice principals, go take a course around a skilled trade, go out, use your PD funds, take a course at Mohawk College. If you're interested in cooking, take a general interest. If you want to learn about what millwrights are doing, go in and play with a CNC at a night course, just like we would around

professional learning for other areas of our practice. This is an area of our practice that we need to have some expertise and some experience about, and it'll be fun.

Brent Coakwell [00:13:45]:
And so if you pick up on a general interest of what you're interested in, in your own life, you might be surprised how that will cross over and change if we walk into a post secondary institution. I was in one last week, it looks very different than what we remember or what we think of that. And can you imagine going in there and sitting alongside students and learning as their peer? We learn so much from that and we will be able to bring that back. So that's one of the biggest advice I would give to my peers is to put yourself out there a little bit. Whether it's an online course, we're so able to do different things and engage with the technology, engage with technological education, maybe in a way you weren't exposed to. And that's an amazing way to do it is through one of our community colleges or through one of our own schools. If you're in elementary, go spend a day or a second or go spend a day in one of those shops and learn alongside the students. They will teach you.

Brent Coakwell [00:14:38]:
They know more than us. We do not need to be the holder of all of the information and we can learn from them and alongside them. So be willing to co learn and, and put yourself out there just a little bit. And I think that will really help. I know that helped me when I was learning around an area that I still look as an area of not my strength. However, people would tell me that is my strength now. And so I think we can really learn from co learning and sharing that with our community that you're doing that work. And when they see us doing that work alongside their children, alongside themselves, they're much more apt to do that.

Brent Coakwell [00:15:14]:
So if you can't go out, maybe you have one of your teachers hold one of your staff meetings in the manufacturing shop, if you're lucky enough to have one, or in the construction shop and learning how to use some of those tools and equipment that might be a little bit outside of your comfort zone.

Lawrence DeMaeyer [00:15:28]:
Thanks so much, Brent. You've given us certainly a lot to think about and some great suggestions and strategies for folks to try, especially if they're just dipping their toe into this area. And I really liked how, you know, I think your suggestion there to just, you know, pick a starting point and find a way to kind of get engaged with the learning is really an important one. I think you've, as I said, given us lots to think about there. So thank you today for sharing your expertise. Can you think, is there one sort of takeaway that you think you would like to share with your peers? Is there one sort of message you would leave them with or one thought?

Brent Coakwell [00:16:07]:
I think the one thought I have is as we're tasked with this new problem, and I do see it as a problem, I also see it as an opportunity around the mandatory tech ed credit in Ontario. This is an opportunity for us to look at things differently. We can look at implementing this and it is not a

one year problem, it's going to be a multi year problem as we go to implement it. But we have the opportunity and also the ability to look at this problem differently. And we can find success in many different ways and challenge ourselves to solve this problem in a mindset that is open. And it's not just about trying to cram it into our current construct. We do really have an opportunity to make some change and to make some positive change for our students and the students of the future coming through our school. So I leave that as a thought, because I do believe there are some unique perspectives out there that we can learn from in education, and this is a prime example of an area that we can really do something different with this new opportunity that we have around technological education in our province.

Brent Coakwell [00:17:11]:
And it's an exciting time for me and I think for all of us to be able to do something really innovative and at the forefront in this area in education.

Susie Lee-Fernandes [00:17:22]:
We hope that you have enjoyed this episode of the Leadership Talks podcast where we engage in authentic conversations with school leaders. Please share with your friends and colleagues and we hope you will join us again.

Lawrence DeMaeyer [00:17:34]:
If you have a passion or story to share as an educational leader or would like to find out more about the other amazing professional learning opportunities offered by the OPC, please visit our website by clicking on the link in the show notes.