

NEW EDTECH PROJECT?

JUST DO IT!



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I know from experience that the implementation of educational technology projects in schools can be enormously challenging, with success dependent on an dizzying array of factors - and not all of them are always necessarily under your complete control. This complexity, along with technical planning and project management inexperience amongst academic staff, can lead to stagnation, reactive decision making, higher costs, frustration and poorer learning outcomes. Yet by doing some initial groundwork and by following key principles, you can greatly increase the likelihood of educational technology enhancing the opportunities for high-quality learning experiences in your school.

#Top-tip 1: Leadership must provide active and committed support - financial, logistical, and moral.

An edtech implementation is only going to succeed when school leadership teams commit to it in word and deed. That support should take the form of practical allocations in all terms necessary, including time to release and train teachers and administrators.

#Top-tip 2: Selling is better than telling. Everyone needs to buy into the change that technology brings.

Technology should never be forced on teachers; its use should never come as a mandate from on high. So, teachers must be given the opportunity to prepare for the kind of change that edtech brings. Leadership requires enabling teachers to become the best that they can be through consultation, collaboration, communication, support, respect, and encouragement.

#Top-tip 3: Invest in, and train, a core team of teachers to be comfortable using edtech

Most staff-rooms contain members who are committed to using educational technology, and they need to be given the opportunity to gain a sufficiently high level of expertise to qualify them to act as role models, advisers, and trouble shooters. They should be given adequate release time to fulfill the following roles and tasks:

- work with other teachers, as individuals or in groups, introducing them
- to new systems, arranging product demonstrations, and helping them
- with any technical or pedagogical problems that might arise;
- work with administration, planning near and long-range computing
- strategies, and mediating on behalf of teachers to help ensure that their
- needs are addressed;
- work with vendors (suppliers of hardware and software), organising
- product demonstrations, making sure products are delivered as
- ordered and warranties are negotiated and fulfilled.

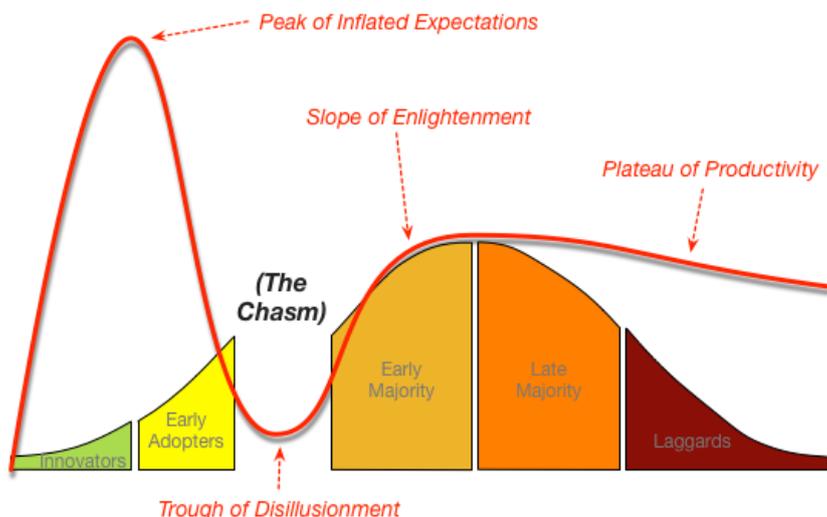
Teachers are the ideal people to work with other teachers because they understand their needs. Teachers who are tech-savvy also have experience working with novices and are therefore less likely to frighten off other teachers who might be less confident.

#Top-tip 4: Recognise that technological change is fast. Keeping up-to-date is challenging and essential.

Ironically, preparation that involves technology puts greater demands on the teacher in terms of time than do more traditional methodologies. That is because the technology makes possible the preparation of learning materials, activities, and experiences that are rich in multimedia, "discovery-style" content. And the possibilities are limited only by the ingenuity of programmers and teachers. It is important that schools provide teachers with every opportunity to stay abreast of advances in technology and, more importantly, must give the teachers time to integrate teaching and learning technologies into the curriculum.

#Top-tip 5: All teachers must receive ongoing training.

Teachers are the leaders in the classroom, but they need ongoing support so that they have the knowledge and skill to feel that they are competent in creating learning opportunities in a technology-rich environment. At the best schools that I have worked at or supported, weekly or fortnightly 'tech-torials' were put in place by teaching staff, for teaching staff, where everyone was invited to participate.



Typical tech-implementation with 'hype-cycle' (red line) overlay

The graph opposite is useful for thinking about how technology projects are implemented, as well as understanding and managing staff expectations during the roll-out.

It shows the teacher profile in terms of technology adoption over time, but it also shows the 'hype-cycle' of the project. The 'peak of inflated expectations' typically occurs just before a project goes live - and is quickly followed by the 'trough of disillusionment' as the inevitable teething problems and frustrations occur during roll-out. This chasm occurs on every project and is to be expected, but it is the groundwork covered in these top-tips that allows schools to bridge this gap and deliver a successful implementation. Implementations that fail generally do so at this point.

#Top-tip 6: All teachers must receive on-demand technical support.

Technology has the potential to bring learning to life, to foster great creativity and collaboration and to boost outcomes. It also has the potential to kill lessons and learning stone dead. All schools should have on-demand, on-site tech support during school hours: in terms of impact on teaching and learning, this is a far more efficient allocation of resources than paying for another teaching assistant, and your staff will likely weep with joy when that printer / projector / wifi / laptop is fixed within minutes rather than a fortnight on Tuesday (if there is time).

#Top-tip 7: Use it or lose it.

Practice makes perfect. Lack of practice can easily lead to the loss of previously acquired skills. There's no point in providing training and technical support if the teachers are not ready and willing to apply newly acquired skills on a regular basis in their professional lives. Likewise, there is no point installing equipment such as a SmartBoard in a classroom if the teacher does not plan to use it with students to help them learn.

#Top-tip 8: Parents and students must be actively involved in the process.

There should be continuity between home and school. In the UK, the vast majority of parents have a computer or tablet with internet access for their child to use at home. There is enormous value in getting parents directly or indirectly involved in their child's education and wider school life by using technology, and schools should actively explore myriad of tools that facilitate this. Active communication and engagement enabled by technology can also help remove much of the uncertainty that surrounds many parents' perceptions of the education that their children are getting in school.

#Top-tip 9: There must be planned and systematic financial investment in technology-integrated teaching and learning.

In challenging economic times and shrinking budgets, it is vital that schools resist the temptation to trim the educational technology budget. It's a fact of life that technologies rapidly become obsolete, so an on-going commitment to funding technology-integrated teaching and learning is a necessity, not an option. The best schools that I have worked with have all recognised that boom-and-bust capital investment in tech results in poor strategic planning and ultimately ends up costing more over the long term and results in poorer outcomes.

Schools that begin to think of technology as a consumable item that requires constant renewal, and part of their operating (rather than fixed) costs, almost always have the most effective and coherent technology strategy. There are now also lots of superb leasing and financing options out there for schools to ease any short-term pain, and which allow schools to plan for regular upgrading of equipment.

#Top-tip 10: Recognise that technology is for all, and that it involves all in the process of lifelong learning.

Children today are growing up with modern technology as part and parcel of their lives. They are digital natives; they cannot imagine their lives without access to technology. Learning at school and at home can be seamless and integrated when the technology is made available in both environments. Parents, children, teachers, and administrators all need to work toward making learning something that children do not "switch off" when they leave the classroom, but rather relish whenever opportunity allows •