

# EDTECH CONFIDENCE COMES WITH PRACTICE

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With technology becoming increasingly present in classrooms, it's an exciting time for education. Teachers across the board recognize its possibilities for innovation, communication, and learning, but it is still the case that some feel daunted by its complexity and anxious about using it with their students.

It's understandable. If teachers are simply given a whistle-stop tour of a solution for an hour or so during a training day, they are unlikely to be confident enough to immediately put it to use in the classroom. What's needed is the chance to get their hands on it, practice, and become familiar with it on their terms. Without this time factored into their timetables, they will struggle to gain a working knowledge of the edtech or use it meaningfully with their students – and so the cost of buying and implementing it is wasted.

## Getting started

Even if you do work in a school that is committed to helping you develop your technical skills and has allocated time to do so, where do you start? Being left alone with unfamiliar technology can be intimidating, so receiving practical training that you can subsequently try out on the actual devices you will be using in class is vital.

Accessing the technology as soon as possible after the training will help you consolidate what you've learned. Taking it slowly and becoming familiar with one feature at a time means that your knowledge and confidence will build together before you put things to the test in front of your students.

To achieve fluency in any new skill, repetition is the key. This rehearsal time is where making mistakes is beneficial as it provides you with the chance to find out how to fix things without being under pressure; minimizing the fear factor and leaving you better prepared for the classroom. Some teachers I have spoken with say they have practiced by videoing themselves and, when happy with the results, have then incorporated the feature into their video exemplars for students or parents. This is a useful tip because you can review and adapt as you go while building up a bonus library of instructional resources at the same time.

## Four stages of learning

When learning new edtech solutions, there are several stages teachers may identify with. These are defined by Mandinach and Cline (1992), who outline the phases of survival, mastery, impact, and innovation.

In line with this, if you hand a new solution to a teacher and provide little or no training, that places them in survival mode. They are not sure how to use it properly and, under pressure with 30 eager faces in front of them (either in class or at home), confidence does not come into it; it is just a case of whether they will sink or swim!

Once teachers have learned the basics, they move to phase two: mastery. This is where they have received training and have had the opportunity to practice by themselves. They have also tried things out in lessons and, when they have worked, this has begun to boost their confidence.

Schools invest in devices, software, and training so that their teachers can generate an impact that their students can benefit from. In this stage, teachers are no longer afraid of the technology, can cope when things don't go to plan, and they and their students are using it effectively.

The final step that every school aspires to is to generate innovation. Here, teachers are using technology intelligently and appropriately; they feel digitally literate and that their technical knowledge is on a par with their pedagogical and content knowledge (TPCK). So much so in fact, that they can share those skills with others and, in effect, become mentors for those less confident than themselves.

## Use it, don't lose it

Throughout these two years of the pandemic, through necessity, technology has taken center stage. So, whether collaborating and communicating in Teams, Zoom, or Google Meet or helping students to learn via ClassDojo or Seesaw, many teachers have worked hard to raise their edtech skills in a short time – and for that, we applaud you!

It's so important that these newfound skills are not lost once we begin to move past the pandemic when the urgent need for remote teaching and learning inevitably diminishes. For that not to happen, the progressive use of edtech needs to



become embedded across the school. Schools can achieve this by reviewing and standardizing their solutions; making things easier for educators moving between sites within a district, and easier to support. So deciding, for example, whether you are an Apple/Google/Microsoft school is key and gives leaders the foundation on which to implement complementary applications that are most accessible for teachers.

A fundamental part of retaining any new skill is continued learning support. This can take various forms, such as ongoing formal training sessions, top-up training, peer sharing, solutions champions, or interacting on dedicated online forums to ask questions and share answers and experiences with others. The key is to keep your knowledge ticking over and evolving with changes in the technology, rather than letting your skill level drop and having to play catch-up. This way, you will gain the knowledge and confidence to use edtech as an innovative tool, rather than simply just 'use' it.

## Skill up for the future

Being digitally literate as an educator has never been more important – and the pandemic has been a huge catalyst for change in this respect, with the need to teach children remotely and maintain communication with parents to support the continuation of learning. The work teachers are doing to increase their digital confidence right now will help to integrate technology into their teaching practice, so that it moves from being a box they must tick to being a tool they automatically use to achieve their pedagogical aims.

*Al Kingsley is Chair of two Multi-Academy Trusts in the UK. He is also the author of **My Secret #EdTech Diary**, a book that examines the past, present, and future role of educational technology and how it influences and shapes our education systems.*