Top tips for delivering engaging EdTech CPD

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We have all witnessed the power of EdTech in supporting lesson planning, marking and providing students with a more tailored learning experience over the last 18 months – both remotely and in person. From complex monitoring systems, online instruction and educational content solutions, through to more basic, everyday tools such as instant messaging platforms, digital technologies are playing an increasingly crucial role in the modern classroom.

However, ahead of the new academic year, which is set to return to fully in-person provision, new research indicates that nearly half of teachers lacked adequate technology at home to enable them to teach remotely during lockdowns – suggesting that more must be done to close this gap in preparation for September and the possibility of further disruption during the months ahead. Whilst digital literacy is most definitely on an upward trend, it's key not to assume a uniform level of access or competence across staff. Admittedly, the pandemic didn't provide the luxury of time to allocate sufficient staff devices or supply more than the bare minimum of EdTech CPD and, unfortunately, as a result, as some teachers may have found the rapid switch to remote learning to be something of a 'sink or swim' situation.

Now we've had time to reflect on how far we've come with EdTech during the recent past (and have even resolved some of the staff access issues), it's becoming clearer how schools can harness its benefits to enhance the teaching and learning of the near future. So, with 88 per cent of school leaders believing that continuing professional development (CPD) is set to be an important factor in determining how well schools recover from the fallout of Covid-19, and another 44 per cent planning to extend their CPD provision, what does digital CPD look like in practice in 2021? Additionally, with more than 80 per cent of teachers reporting increased work-related stress since March 2020, how can we avoid EdTech CPD becoming a chore for teachers who are already pushed to their limit?

Here are some top tips for schools to consider…

Start with the basics

While technology can offer new and exciting ways to engage with professional development, not everyone will have a basic level of confidence when it comes to using it. And although most staff will now be familiar with the school's main programmes after eighteen months of blended learning, there is still value in conducting a skills audit to ascertain each teacher's individual proficiency before you introduce additional EdTech initiatives or technologies to the mix.

Take things slowly

With thousands of new online applications and systems just a touch of a button away, it's key that staff are provided with ongoing training and support to stay up to date with the tsunami of new releases and updates. Rather than opting for the typical start of term inset days, plan the academic year to ensure that staff receive CPD training on key tools regularly – and in varied forms like formal sessions, peer sharing, solutions champions, or by interacting on dedicated online forums and Twitter to share best practice.
Keeping learning development sessions concise over the space of the year will ensure CPD doesn't risk becoming overwhelming for staff at any point. Returning to content regularly and taking consistent breaks have been proven to be the most effective ways to learn a new skill, as well as helping it to remain fresh in your mind.

Build CPD into everyday tasks

The beauty of EdTech CPD is its inherently flexible nature – meaning that staff don't have to be squeezed around one staffroom table at the same time but can access the content to suit their schedules. Schools can help bolster this by curating a range of CPD content via mediums such as podcasts, that can easily fit around everyday occurrences like the work commute. This will help to make completing CPD feel less like a chore, as staff can tailor their participation to suit their own learning needs and schedule.
Another effective way to incorporate CPD into daily routines is to encourage an exchange of ideas over social media, and for everyone to stay up to date with the latest ideas by following the Twitter feeds of industry experts and reading online education updates. These time-efficient activities can provide greater variety in terms of how CPD content is consumed and retained.

Share and innovate with peers

Some multi-academy trusts I work with schedule regular 'tech clubs' to share ideas, new apps and top tips. Not only does this foster innovation, but it also provides a dedicated space for teachers to take a leaf out of their students' book and put their hand up to ask for help! Peer sharing and interaction is vital to build knowledge, as well as confidence.

Looking back to move forward

Educators and schools have worked extremely hard over the last 18 months to significantly improve their edtech skills. It's a fantastic foundation upon which to build to ensure continued progress and further embed edtech into education, with CPD playing an important part as one of the key enablers in breathing new life into the curriculum, school community and staff skillset. Although many will be breathing a sigh of relief to wave goodbye to Zoom, it's important that schools reflect upon the past year and a half to be able to put their best tech foot forward this term.