INCREASING TEACHERS' EDTECH CONFIDENCE ONE STEP AT A TIME

Published by Teach Middle East | Comments by Al Kingsley

With the radical changes that have occured in education over the last year, teachers have had no choice but to get on board with technology. Some were already extremely comfortable teaching this way, but for those who previously only used it minimally in the classroom, facing their fears and tackling it head-on was the only option if education was to continue throughout the dark months of the pandemic.

Of course, there's a difference between choosing not to use EdTech for pedagogical reasons (i.e., if the learning situation is not appropriate for its application) and choosing not to use it due to lack of confidence. Let's deal with the latter here, because not moving forward with technology due to feelings of being overwhelmed or uncertain is absolutely something that can be overcome with the right support from senior leaders and colleagues. I think the majority of schools now realise that not doing so is counterproductive, and they will try to assist teachers as much as they can,within the limits of their budgets.

Removing any barriers to more fluent EdTech use in the classroom has taken on a new priority for schools, now that we have seen just how important it has been over the last year. Indeed, some of the adjustments that have been made out of necessity (e.g., online parents' evenings, using a variety of tech solutions for communication, apps for audio feedback, the use of video exemplars and so on) have worked so well that many schools are planning to continue them in the future. So, it's now clear that, in terms of technology use, there is no going back to how it was before and EdTech is set to become even more embedded throughout schools across the world.

Struggling with edtech?

What happens, though, if you are one of the teachers who has seen their colleagues making great strides with EdTech and you feel left behind? The use of technology doesn't require a special talent; it's simply a process of building skills upon skills. Think of it this way: long ago, people changed channels on the TV by pressing dedicated buttons on the set.

Then we learned to use the remote control and then later hook up and use a video recorder, then a DVD player – and now we're streaming films and interacting with TV-related content. The accumulation of skills over time has led to us all being extremely comfortable with this kind of technology.

To help you reach this point with EdTech, there are three lines of approach:

1. Preparing by yourself

We've all heard the common-sense advice to "use the right tools for the job", and this applies to building your EdTech skills in the classroom. Practising on the actual device, you will be using to teach with makes sense and will eliminate the additional worry of having to lead a class when using unfamiliar technology. Introducing one new tech feature into your teaching at a time and not trying to do too much at once will keep your head clear and your tech fears manageable – and when it all goes well, it's a foundation that you can build upon, practically and psychologically. Going over things by yourself will also go a long way to alleviating the fear of doing something wrong, as this is a time when you can make mistakes – and learn how to fix them – without the pressure of being in front of your students.

2. Working with colleagues

In any workplace, if there's a person who has a particular skill or is good at something, then the word gets around. You'll know who the technology champions in your school are, as well as the teachers who do a great job of using it in their lessons. Don't be afraid to ask for their advice or tips on the solutions you are getting to grips with. And if you are a 'tech champion' yourself, you can help others become more confident not just by disseminating knowledge but also by celebrating their successes.

Another useful way to keep abreast of EdTech trends and tips for the classroom is to cultivate an EdTech personal learning network on social media. Here, you'll see discussions, questions being answered, and tips being shared. It's a great way to stay up to date with how different solutions are applied to teaching and learning, and it will keep your knowledge current.

3. Gaining support from senior leaders

Schools are likely to have a digital plan or strategy in place with aspirations for how their staff will use technology for better student engagement, communication, efficiency and so on, right across the board. You are a vital part of this. Helping the school achieve its vision for technology integration is something all staff will work towards together. So, if you have training needs, then share them with your leaders. You may not be the only one. This way, the school will be aware of the additional measures they need to put in place to ensure their EdTech goals are achievable

The use of technology in schools is vital to help students prepare for an increasingly digital world, and the pandemic has turbocharged this notion, with vastly increased EdTech use all around. However, if teaching with technology is still daunting to you, then please be assured that it's not an exclusive club of power users; with your own dedication and the support of your peers and your leadership team, everything is possible.

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