

What do teachers think about integration of tech in the classroom?

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If you have been paying attention at all, you know K-12 education is undergoing a revolution in technology and teaching techniques not seen since pencil and paper replaced slate; the introduction of digital technology in the classroom.

It is difficult to find any school related article which doesn't discuss technology and its use in the classroom. Ed tech is purported to be necessary in helping teachers educate students in 21st century skills. This change necessitates new teaching strategies. The teacher is no longer the fount of knowledge but the guide.

Despite the hoopla, not everyone is enamored by this change. For teachers, it is a love/hate relationship. There are still those who distrust the push toward ed tech. A few suspect this is another "new thing" that will go the way of previous education fads that have burst onto the scene only to wither and fade away.

In the last few years, this thought has begun to wilt in the face of the overwhelming daily use of technology. Cell phones have evolved into smart phones which are really minicomputers

capable of nearly anything with the introduction of apps. Need we be concerned about cell phone addiction?

Students and Teachers Use Tech Daily

Initially schools banned cell phones in the classroom because they were a distraction. Now many teachers incorporate their use in instruction. Because less than 20 percent of our schools are issuing tablets and lap top computers to students the same way they once gave out textbooks, student tech use is now a necessity. Districts need to keep the tech expense about the same as textbook purchases were, but initial purchase costs plus upkeep of tablets and laptops is tremendous. If you include the cost of teacher tech training sessions plus implement the mandatory changes in instruction strategies to teach students the new skills, it adds up. Teachers are usually disappointed in their district's tech training sessions because they don't meet the instructor's actual needs and aid them in using technology in a meaningful way to help students gain such 21st century skills as: critical thinking, collaboration and teamwork, creativity and

imagination and problem solving.

A positive tech use occurs with students taking make-up notes. Instead of copying notes by hand, they simply take a picture which streamlines student note-taking from the board or another student. But classroom cell phone use has a security risk: students can now take a picture of the test and share it with others testing later in the day.

An increasing number of teachers feel ed tech is not only the ‘wave of the future’ but the current reality. As one teacher said, “Technology is here to stay. We might as well get used to it... technology engages students as nothing else can.” Teachers recognize that keeping students engaged in any learning activity is vital.

Teachers Still Struggle with Tech Availability

Teachers and students battle to get access to their school’s reliable digital devices and a healthy bandwidth. The last controls the number of users the district and school’s infrastructure can handle all at once. Any one of these factors blocks teacher and student use of a district’s technology. Those districts that have a tech specialist in every building help teachers continue lessons by having someone on hand who can immediately fix a glitch and allow the lesson to continue. Without this or a tech savvy teacher next door, a lesson plan can go down in flames even if a non-tech back up

lesson is available.

Teachers Agree That They Do Not Have Discretionary Time

One teacher commented that “My biggest problem with technology is I’m always told it will take less time and it will make my job easier. It never does.” Not only are there new technological skills but also teaching techniques to learn. That takes time and energy the teacher just may not have. Forty-three percent of the teachers are spending over 60 hours a week doing school work in and out of the classroom. That does not include sponsoring and leading student groups or coaching or working at outside jobs to augment low salaries. Those issues are on top of the multitude of expectations of researching for and building lessons, researching reliable/safe sources for student use, keeping track of each student’s learning and mental health and school duties. “It’s got to be worth the time it takes,” wrote one teacher. Nonetheless, in the 2015 Gates survey, 93 percent of the 3,100 teachers regularly use some form of digital tool to guide instruction. However, less than 20 percent of the teachers, who are tech users on their own, have one-to-one devices for their students.

Teachers also know that many of their students lack home internet access. If a district switches from paper textbooks to digital as some have, those students won’t have access. Another teacher

added, “The paradox is that some of those same students without home internet access will have an expensive smart phone. Another issue he brought up was the difficulty in keeping up with the fast and constant changes in tech and how to use them to help students learn. “You just get comfortable with one digital device or software/hardware, and another comes along with a whole new learning set.” Typically teachers use tools chosen by a district administrator or someone else who is rarely still in the classroom. Interesting enough, only 59 percent of teachers think the digital tools they use frequently are effective. The 18 percent of teachers who do choose their own technology depend mostly on advice from fellow teachers and school leaders. Their standards for tool selection are: cost effectiveness, time saving, simplicity to integrate into instruction and ability to tailor student tasks and instruction based on individual student’s needs. 67 percent think that digital and non digital resources are available and sufficient to help students master subject standards, which is up from 55 percent from the previous survey taken two years earlier. Interestingly, only 56 percent of those surveyed believe data and digital tools make them better teachers.

The teachers who are adhering to more “sophisticated and challenging standards, understand the complexity of weaving together

different strands and concepts in ways that push students further,” one teacher blogged. However, he added that “teaching with standards is not equivalent to covering a checklist of topics, [it] is an art form that takes thought - how to challenge students, how to synthesize and apply the content that they have learned.” One common complaint was that “Digital resources tend to be ‘one size fits all.’” More flexibility is needed. Teachers now must share files and email with individual students who need individualized tasks, collaborate with parents, other teachers and administrators - all to help the most in-need students in a seamless way.

Teachers do seem increasingly confident about the better quality and usefulness of digital tools and know that this revolution is here to stay because it mirrors the changes in our society. A ‘pressure cooker’ teaching atmosphere is building in our schools. Rising expectations, frequent policy changes and ever-growing demands on top of a radical decrease in teachers’ discretionary time, accompanied by the increasing lack of control over their classrooms, are creating an impossible working environment. Is it any wonder that teachers are dropping out of the classroom within the first 5 years of their career while at the same time fewer college graduates are entering that profession?

<http://www.seenmagazine.us/Articles/Article-Detail/ArticleId/5953/>
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