



How the Most Promising EdTech is Helping Teachers Connect

For decades now, schools have unwittingly been purchasing technology for the sole purpose of substitution — or according to the SAMR framework, using technology as a direct replacement for other traditional tools but without a true transformative element. The framework outlines four degrees of technology integration in the classroom: substitution, augmentation, modification and redefinition. It is within the latter two — modification and redefinition — that real change happens. According to SAMR, to truly make a difference in the lives of students, EdTech must enable new paradigms providing meaningful experiences for young people.

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For instance, many educational institutions embraced digital textbooks in lieu of printed versions. Online worksheets replaced paper workbooks. Streamed video unseated the use of DVDs.

All of this makes EdTech look great at a surface level. But upon further inspection, these digital steps, while well-intentioned and good for areas such as cost savings and environmental impact, are not the most meaningful when it comes to how educators inspire and instruct students.

Technology defining classrooms of the future must speak to the foundation from which the best learning always stems: a dynamic connection between teacher and student.

It is time for educators to be more discerning with their EdTech purchases. Experiential innovation that empowers young people to play an active role in their learning, as opposed to sitting in their seats passively absorbing information, represents modern learning at its best.



Now before I start to pat myself on the back for creating a hardware acquisition plan that would take us from the dark ages to a more modern infrastructure, I missed the very issues I so often try to raise with school officials 20 years later. I forgot to answer the question, “How do I want technology to transform teaching and learning?”

Investing in PBL to Engage Students

Today, a growing number of K-12 classrooms are embracing project-based learning (PBL), an instructional method that encourages students to apply knowledge and skills through engaging experiences.



PBL gives students a real-world challenge to work together — frequently over great distances using connected technology. This experience-driven approach leverages the personal passions of every student and helps them become more invested in their own educational journeys. Together with their teachers, students apply critical thinking to scenarios and challenges that would not have been possible with traditional instructional methods.

Approaches like PBL can only work if schools approach technology as more than just devices. Laptops, tablets and mobile phone apps are just table stakes — the basic items you need in order to play in the modern education game. In fact, more than half of teachers worry that focusing on technology takes away from their ability to connect with students, according to the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Educator Confidence Report. For PBL to really be valuable, it has to be about the holistic experience, not just an exercise that involves devices.



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