**What Comes First: the Curriculum or the Technology?**

By [Elise Ecoff](http://www.edudemic.com/author/elise-ecoff/) on February 10, 2015[@NBPSEagles](http://www.twitter.com/NBPSEagles)

It's hard to imagine now, but there was a time when handing a student a calculator to work through algebraic equations caused many teachers and parents great consternation. It makes you wonder what type of pushback the creators of the abacus faced! In both cases, while the tools students were using may have been more advanced than previous generations', the goal remained the same - to enhance classroom learning.

But before moving forward with technology integration, every school must first have a great, robust and adaptable academic curriculum. Only then can you begin to find ways in which technology can help to elevate it. It's important to never force fit technology - if it's not supplementing what's already happening in the classroom or a teacher's goals for the school year, the addition will become more of a barrier to learning than a catalyst.

**A Few Questions to Consider**

We live in an era where schools are praised simply for putting iPads in the hands of their students. While familiarization with new technologies can certainly benefit students, ask yourself the following questions before implementing any new tech into the classroom:

* Regardless of the technology, what's the most important lesson for students to learn?
* Why do I need to use technology in my daily curriculum?
* How are these tech tools enhancing what we're doing?
* What will the students do with these tools - during and after class?

**Think Curriculum Enhancements, Not Technology Implementations**

Even if you feel ready to utilize tech in your classroom, you need to be confident that the implementation will enhance your curriculum, not hinder it.  Here are five ways to ensure you're putting the curriculum before the technology:

**1) Learn How Students Are Using Technology at Home**

It's important to understand what kind of technology students are already familiar with outside of the classroom.  Ask them what they're currently using, what they're interested in learning more about, and how much screen time they're allowed at home. These conversations will help you determine the opportunities and challenges you'll face when implementing tech into the classroom. It can also spark inspiration for your in-school tech solutions.  For example, if all your students are familiar with tablets and how they work, you can tweak your lessons plans to more heavily rely on tablet utilization.

**2) Don't Use Technology for the Sake of Using Technology**

Tech needs to be used for a practical purpose, not just because it's the "cool" thing to do or because everyone else is doing it. If you do not truly understand how and why to use tech as a learning tool, you're not ready to implement it just yet.

**3) Focus on Just One Tech Implementation**

When you try to implement too much technology at once, you can lose sight of its true purpose, which is to elevate learning in the classroom.  Technology is ever evolving and it can be challenging to keep up with the new tools and solutions that are popping up almost every day. Trying to leverage too much tech at once can be overwhelming, not just for teachers, but for students and their parents too. Feeling overwhelmed can lead to frustration, and then defeat. That's why I recommend to all my teachers to focus on one tech implementation at a time, and to learn it and learn it well before moving on.

**4) Utilize the SAMR Model**

The [SAMR model](http://www.educatorstechnology.com/2013/06/samr-model-explained-for-teachers.html), developed by Dr. Ruben Puentedura, represents the stages of tech integration: Substitution, Augmentation, Modification and Redefinition. This model challenges us to assess and reflect on not only how we integrate technology into our curriculum, but also how we modify, redefine and transform our classrooms through its use. Many schools have implemented the first two stages, but still have not mastered the final two. This is important because the Modification and Redefinition stages are where technology is being used most efficiently and truly enhancing the learning experience.

**5) Actively Seek Out Professional Development Opportunities**

Being current on how others are implementing technology is critical. There are infinite free, online educational resources for both teachers and administrators to read about tech experiences, and learn from them. This works especially well when schools are tapped into larger networks, through which colleagues can learn from each other and share best practices.

Once you're confident your school offers a robust curriculum that provides an unmatched educational experience, the possibilities for technology integration are endless. For example:

* Younger students utilizing QR codes to add a challenging yet fun element to learning to spell.
* Older students creating digital books or movies to demonstrate a deep understanding on a topic, rather than simply discussing or assessing it.
* Video conferencing with other schools in your area or network to research, discuss, debate and develop potential solutions to globally significant problems.
* Skyping with local leaders and guest speakers on specific topics such as coding or programming, networking and composing music.

**In Short**

Integrating technology into the classroom can be exhilarating, fun, and at times a little scary. That said, I've often found that teachers are hungry for more information, and welcome the chance to bring new ideas to the classroom.

In the end, if teachers and their administration are ready to embrace the messiness and the risks that sometimes come with technology, the reward is that your school's curriculum - which must be strong to start - can truly be taken to the next level, and beyond. Otherwise, we'll all be still left trying to figure out how an abacus works.

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