

Ten Reasons why Teachers can Struggle to use Technology in the Classroom

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Integrating technology into the classroom can have huge benefits, but it's not always straight forward. From www.shutterstock.com



Professional development and creating a shared vision for ICT education is important. marcoantonio.torresflickr.jpg

Somewhere in a school near you some teacher is struggling to handle a query from a student whose laptop has a flat battery, or another who is watching an amusing cat video on a phone. Perhaps the wireless internet connection is dropping in and out, or the electronic whiteboard is playing up.

Whilst all teachers are expected to integrate technology into the classroom, the reality can be very different.

Some of the issues teachers can face relate to the technology itself. Others relate to student or parent expectations, or whether there's enough of the right professional development available to help the teachers become proficient in digital technology.

Without addressing these concerns, there is a risk of creating a generation of students ill-prepared for a digital future.

The pressure to become digital experts

No doubt digital technologies can enhance learning through accessing information and improving communication, as well as providing self-directed and collaborative learning opportunities. ICT skills can also help develop capable, future-ready citizens. So over the past decade, teachers have been expected to integrate digital technologies.

Students might be “digital natives”, comfortable with and immersed in technology, but they still depend on teachers to learn through digital means.

The curriculum requires teachers to develop students' general information and communication technology (ICT) capabilities across all fields of study, alongside the “technologies” curriculum.

Governments have prioritised getting digital technology into schools with large-scale programs such as Connected Classrooms in NSW and the national Digital Education Revolution. Pre-service teacher training programs have been advised to “enhance” initial teacher education by getting them to use innovative technology practices.

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, (AITSL), also expects all teaching levels to effectively implement, use, model, lead and support ICT technologies.

However, in practice, many teachers struggle.

Despite significant resources allocated to integrating technology in the classroom, many teachers have struggled with disruptions that devices can bring, had their work negatively impacted, or have not used technologies effectively. Moreover, many pre-service teachers perceive introducing new technologies as a future teaching barrier.

Ten reasons teachers can struggle to use new technologies in the classroom.

1. Introduced technology is not always preferred.

Technology isn't always the answer. Pre-service teachers have reflected on having preferences for manual writing (compared to typing) and incidences of doubling up on time writing notes. Some students also prefer reading print, and teachers can disengage from introducing new technology when they feel it adds nothing extra.

Ten Reasons why Teachers can Struggle to use Technology in the Classroom (continued)

2. Differing device capabilities and instructions.

When students are required to bring their own devices to school, there can be major differences in device capability, for example, between what a cheap android phone can do compared with an iPad. Students may have difficulty writing on small devices over long periods. Teachers may need to give multiple instructions for numerous different devices.

3. It's easy for students to be distracted.

Students regularly use devices for social media, playing games, instant messaging, text messaging and emailing rather than for class work. Students have been described as “digital rebels” (accessing social media and texting), “cyber wanderers” (succumbing to virtual games) and “eLearning pioneers” (undertaking online studies during class time).

4. Technology can affect lesson time and flow.

Lessons are interrupted by regular negotiations that reduce lesson time. This is related to students not putting screens down (during instructions), concealing screens from teachers' view, pretending that devices don't work, and devices being insufficiently charged.

Digital technology training, and preparing lessons to include new technologies, can also be very time-consuming.

5. Teachers need more professional development.

There are nearly 300,000 teachers across Australia. They need access to ICT improvements for classroom implementation, and to keep up with continuous technological advances. This needs to be regular, scaffolded and sustainable. However, allocation of professional learning resources has been reported to be sporadic in scope and quality.

6. Not everyone has technology at home.

Not all teachers or students use a computer at home, or are frequent users, have sufficient data or internet access. There is a digital divide of reduced computer literacy in students from Indigenous, lower socioeconomic or regional/rural backgrounds. This creates challenges for teachers if they have to set different tasks for different students, or if they avoid setting homework with a digital component.

7. Teachers need to protect students.

Immersion of students in digital technologies has created additional demands for teachers to protect students' behaviours online (safety, legal risks and privacy), and in the classroom (theft and locking of devices).

8. Not all teachers 'believe' in using technology.

A wide range of research has established that if teachers don't believe in using digital technologies they will fail to transform

classes, align with learning goals, or integrate technology into curricular content.

9. Lack of adequate ICT support, infrastructure, or time.

Appropriate access to technical support (classroom and informally), the availability of infrastructure (computer labs, software), policies (whether to administer digital homework) and the time allocated to incorporate new technologies, are major challenges for teachers.

10. Tensions between students and teachers.

There have been tensions when teachers have confiscated “personally owned” devices. Often there are difficulties accessing power sockets, and challenges when students find information online that conflicts with what the teacher is teaching.

What can be done to overcome these struggles?

Clearly there can be no single technological solution that applies for every teacher, every course, or every view of teaching. Integrating technology in the classroom is a complex and varied process for many teachers.

Meaningful technology integration depends on more than device use. There are important steps to make sure integrating technology aligns with the way you teach and what you are teaching.

Professional development has tried to address teachers' technology struggles, but much of that has been limited to one-shot or “one solution for all” strategies. What is needed is an approach to ICT professional development with different layers to handle the many and various situations teachers find themselves in, and to handle the varied levels of teaching experience and confidence.

Developing a common vision about the role of ICT in education with stakeholders, and creating a shared community of practice is important.

Without holistic improvements to teacher support and training that are capable of addressing the many issues teachers face, there is a genuine risk of creating a generation of students ill-prepared for a digital future.

This article was first published in 'The Conversation' on 14th August, 2018.

SEN and the Science Teachers' Association of NSW are most grateful to 'The Conversation' for its generous policy of encouraging the republishing of its many fine articles. We also thank the author, Dr Brendon Hyndman, for supplying this article, thereby endorsing this policy.