



No excuses! Technology offers more options to expand access and innovation

Recent advances in technology offer us an exciting opportunity to re-examine our approaches to professional learning. The growing availability of technology allows us to think about how we can increase overall effectiveness and efficiency even as we expand access and innovation. We might consider where to use technology to save resources, but more importantly achieve goals we once considered unattainable. During the process, we can clarify when to use face-to-face and online learning settings. I believe this process can lead to a more powerful strategy for promoting professional learning that improves staff and student performance.

Technology advances give us new responses to excuses for poor decisions and implementation.

Excuse: We don't have the staff to provide follow-up support for training.

Response: Use technology tools to provide follow-up support, including webinars to review key content introduced in face-to-face learning sessions, facilitated online dialogues for sharing concerns and getting help during implementation, and one-on-one coaching sessions via the Internet or phone.

Excuse: We continue the workshop approach to professional development because we do not have the resources to

implement a more effective and comprehensive approach.

Response: Invest in a professional development audit (conducted by either internal or external staff) to identify activities that would be streamlined by using technology. For example, new technological applications are available to store and track staff development plans and offerings; critical learning sessions can be captured and replayed for staff members who are unavailable during initial offerings; time and money are saved when networking across long distances is facilitated online.

Excuse: Documenting the impact of our professional development efforts is too complicated.

Response: We can expect to see support and resources for professional learning decline further if we fail to document a return on investment. We must collect evidence on professional learning results, and we must examine it for its implications. New technologies can help us accomplish this. Staff can record school improvement and professional development plans online with a theory of change clearly specified. They can easily organize and collect data to document professional learning results. Such data may include the outcomes for learning sessions and how participants

show knowledge and skill. Technology is the optimal tool to capture lesson plans, peer reviews, and actual classroom teaching videos to demonstrate implementation. Finally, classroom assessment results, benchmark exams, end-of-year course tests, and teacher reflections can also be used as evidence.

I admit that when technology first became a significant factor in education, I wasn't much of a fan. Like other changes we are asked to make, my reaction was textbook. If you were charting my experience, you would find each

stage of change as outlined in the Concerns-Based Adoption Model.

As I reflect, I am surprised by how long it took me to get to the more advanced stages in my tech-

nology journey. It may take some time for you to invest in the changes I have described, and I am hopeful that you have colleagues who will assist you.

Advances in technology invite us to consider our next steps. With each new tool, we will need to be thoughtful about how we best achieve the outcomes we seek and better address the needs of those we serve. Every time we take this step, I am confident we will improve our support and accelerate our pace toward our goals. ■



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