Alive in the Swamp- Investigating Digital Education

As I started to read this article, I was intrigued by a couple of points that the authors were bringing to the forefront. Firstly, I was struck by the graph that showed how student's interest in school plummeted as they progressed though the education system. As the article points out, school is becomes less fun and less engaging as time goes on, even though we have the highly interactive tool of technology to use in our classroom. In a previous article, Fullan points out that in order to create educational reform, learning systems must meet the following criteria: be engaging and intuitive for instructors and students, elegant and easy to adapt, unlimited access to technology and assignments should be related to real life situations. I also noted that Fullan and Donnelly described the role of the teacher is a way that I had not seen before. With integration of technology in classrooms, the role of the teacher has moved from being the guide at the side to that of facilitator. Fullan and Donnelly suggest that the role of the teacher needs to evolve further. They have discovered that teacher as activator, where teacher and student are reciprocal teaching each other, has a greater impact on student learning than teacher as facilitator. With the current explosion of technology, the integration of these tools in an effective manner needs to be explored further if technology is going to revolutionize the education system.

Fullan and Donnelly point out that there has been a large investment of time and money for integrating technology into the classrooms, yet, there hasn't been a large scale educational reform as a result. Schools and School Districts are constantly being bombarded with new choices every day. Although technology may be used in certain pockets in small areas successfully, not all students are benefitting by the same opportunities. In sum, Fullan and Donnelly have found that digital innovations have failed in two respects: they have put technology above teaching and excitement above evidence. In order to overcome the education system's shortcomings of successfully implementing technology, Fullan and Donnelly have created an innovation score card that assesses new tools to be implemented based on three categories: pedagogy, system change and technology. They use a color code system, very similar to that of a street light, of green, amber and red to assess the usefulness of an innovation. Inside the category of Pedagogy, aspects such as clarity and alignment with learning outcomes are evaluated. Inside the criteria of system change, the index is evaluating the extent at which the innovation will be supported by the designer of the product. Lastly, the aspect of technology investigates the quality and ease of use of the product based on user experience. Before implementing technology into a school, it would be useful to determine the effectiveness of the innovation prior to its use. Fullan and Donnelly found that, with the innovations that they tested had the greatest short comings under the pedagogy and innovation support. We are constantly being bombarded with innovations to use in our classrooms, this index created by Fullan and Donnelly helps assist us navigate the swamp of innovations.

Technologies are constantly evolving. To navigate the swamp of the endless opportunities and changes, Fullan and Donnelly make several suggestions. From their list of six, I would like to focus on three of them. The one that struck me with most significance was to lead with pedagogy. Technology must be a useful tool that complements the desired learning outcomes and shouldn't, in itself, be given the main priority in developing curriculum. We have often discussed that technology should not be used for technology sake. The role of the teacher and the student should be well defined prior to adding technology to the mix and only then, should it be used to accelerate the learning towards a desired goal.

Next on my list of recommendations was the aspect of developing capacity with respect to system support. If the goal is to increase the use of effective technology on a wide scale, then support and leadership is going to be needed. If an innovation is going to be successful, most likely is will start small scale and then grow in popularity because of its usefulness. This would require support of teachers, administrators and technological support. If these pieces work harmoniously, then capacity will build and the innovation will grow in users. Lastly from the list of recommendations, I would like to discuss the idea of being open to surprises. Because technology is constantly evolving, new ideas are continuously emerging from the swamp. Being open and receptive to change can lead to transformation and thereby increase the spread of effective technology. As use of technology increases in today's teaching practices, it's important to select wisely the creatures coming from the swamp so as to make education meaningful and engaging experience for all students.

Source;

Donnelly, K., & Fullan, M. (2013, July). Alive in the Swamp: Assessing digital innovations in education. Retrieved January 23, 2016, from http://www.nesta.org.uk/publications/alive-swamp-assessing-digital-innovations-education