Teachers Talk: What Educators Want and Need from Digital Tools

Many parents, students, and educators want to see more digital tools in the classroom. To achieve that goal, digital technology companies need to recognize and address students' and teachers' needs.

Digital learning tools have come a long way. Teachers can do everything from take students on virtual field trips to supplement lesson plans with interactive exercises. In a Teachers Know Best study (a research project conducted by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in November 2015) 93 percent of the 3,100 K-12 teachers surveyed said they use some form of technology in the classroom. That's why it's so imperative that companies create tools that offer the features and benefits teachers want most.

Take a look at the top benefits that teachers look for when considering new digital tools, as per the Teachers Know Best study:

1. **Easy to integrate.** Integration is a key point that every technology adopter looks for in a solution. If a teacher cannot easily access the tool on commonly used devices, he or she is less likely to use it on a regular basis. One teacher featured in an EdSurge.com article said he uses Google Apps for Education with his students because the tools all function similarly so there isn't much of a learning curve. He can also easily access the activity results, and collaboration is seamless.
2. **Time efficiency.** Digital tools should provide a result that's worth the time teachers and students spend using it. Tools that take hours to learn or that require users to access the tool only on certain devices may not offer enough of an incentive for classroom adoption.
3. **Cost-effectiveness.** Teachers are almost always constrained by school budgets. Tools that require an investment should demonstrate a return over time. Digital tools don't necessarily need to be free to promote user adoption, but they should provide a clear value proposition that makes sense to teachers and schools.
4. **Customizable capabilities.** Students learn at different rates and have different learning needs. In classrooms today, many teachers provide personalized activities for different students. As such, having more products that cater to individual student needs and learning capabilities can enhance the classroom experience. For instance, if a tool has flexible options for students with physical disabilities, cognitive differences, or students who speak different languages, it can provide a greater value.
5. **Better data.** Teachers don't need comprehensive data sets in the classroom setting. What they do need is data they can use. For instance, a teacher may assign an activity using an app or software program. If that program doesn't easily integrate with a grading system, the teacher then has to spend extra time manually inputting grades for one small assignment. Showing trends in student accomplishments within a tool is helpful, but teachers need to be able to use the information holistically.
6. **Meet curriculum standards.** Teachers have to follow certain educational standards to prepare students for college, career readiness, and graduation tests. Although a tool may provide an innovative look at something and engage students, it still needs to enhance the curriculum that teachers are responsible for providing. Highly adoptable tools provide interdisciplinary curriculum-friendly activities.

When it comes to digital technology, teachers need tools that are both engaging for students, and meet their needs as educators. Innovative tools that press the boundaries of modern education while taking these practical classroom benefits into consideration will ultimately win long-term adoption rates.