LAST WORDS

↘ IT'S TEMPTING AS A TEACHER TO GIVE IT ALL UP WHEN TECHNOLOGY LETS US DOWN. BUT THAT'S FAILING THE PEOPLE WHO MATTER MOST, SAYS THIS ISSUE'S ANONYMOUS EDUCATOR…

The pupils are excited. Thrilled even; joyously demonstrating that thirst for learning we are all being told so eloquently is central to outstanding teaching. This should be a good thing. I have promised them that today's lesson will be interactive, proactive and, if the amount of energy drinks they are trying to convince me they haven't consumed is any kind of pointer, radioactive.

What could possibly go wrong?

Our school has recently spent big on Whiteboards, Response Systems and Touch Screens, making the opportunities for pupils to experience learning in a truly interactive way perfectly viable and part of their daily educational diet. This is as it should be.

Everybody knows that to get pupils engaged, actively learning and industry or higher education ready, we need to be far more modern in our approach to lessons. Technology should no longer be viewed as a treat, or something for once a term. It should be there. In every classroom. At the touch of a button.

The idea for the lesson in itself is pupil-friendly and involves some preparation on both my part and theirs. We have a Key Stage 3 unit of work, cross curricular with ICT and PSHE, entitled rather poignantly 'How important is technology in our community?' Last lesson pupils had to email photos of original ways technology is used in their home town to their school email. The G&T pupils used these to create an online questionnaire in which they get to use their favourite piece of technology after Touch Screen Tablets: The Voting Response Systems, or, Those Who Wants To Be a Millionaire? Thingies, as some excitedly call them.

This will be the starter, so should take a maximum of ten minutes, including logging on. They are analysing, assessing and evaluating as well as using software and hardware to express opinions and beliefs. This is what it is all about. I can actually hear the joyous overtures of my next appraisal.

But of course, three pupils have forgotten their log-ons. The IT department is at least a five-minute walk from this room. They need to go and get new passwords. I am not sure the Response Systems can wait that long. I mumble something about joining in when they get back, but they, and I, know that they have missed out and we will have moved onto the next activity by this point. The next activity is fun, but it doesn't involve pressing buttons and seeing graphs pop up on the interactive whiteboard in lovely colours tracking the responses of themselves and their peers.

The pupils are to move between work stations and tablets, collecting data, information all at the swipe of a finger. They will create an advertisement piece that could be given out at the local tourist information centre.

It is getting complicated.

And slightly shambolic.

Somebody has taken a photo of someone's against-school-rule piercing and is uploading it to Facebook. This is why some schools have phone bans. Somebody else has dropped a tablet. The whiteboard is buffering and telling me I don't have permission to go on YouTube and that, in fact, the filter in the projector needs cleaning.

A stern email pings into my school account telling me that under no circumstances should I be allowing groups of pupils down to the IT room to get passwords and that I should follow school policy of one pupil at a time with a signed note (I did know that but I, like many other teachers before – and I'm sure after – me thought it 'wouldn't really matter this once as I was desperate').

I can feel my inner traditionalist starting to simmer. This would NEVER happen in my own classroom with a bit of sugar paper and some felt tips.

But then my practical side – the side that has enabled me to teach for as long as I have – takes over. What can I learn from this? What can be done? It isn't right that I give up on my attempts to use technology in my teaching just because it's a bit annoying, a bit time consuming, a bit open to me looking a bit ridiculous. What can a school – and a teacher – do to make sure it has purpose and actually 'works'? Preparation is the key. Mine, the pupils and, if we are to be able to help the pupils become the active members of the technological world they deserve to be, SLT and SLs. We need training. We need organisation. We need to be able to be shown and get to try out best practice in ways that actually make it a worthwhile learning experience, rather than a tick box exercise in 'using technology'. We have to get over the idea that pupils sitting in neat, quiet rows equals good teaching and learning.

At the end of the lesson someone says, 'Can we use the Who Wants To Be A Millionaire Thingies next lesson?'

Who am I to say no?

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