Expert Advice on Implementing Digital Resources

With tips and perspectives from Sunny Thakaral & Abhimanyu Jakhar

Foreword

Whether you're in a physical classroom or teaching remotely, digital resources can be a great addition to your teaching plan to ensure variety alongside maintaining and increasing engagement.

For many people in recent months online learning is a new experience, so we have interviewed two experts for great tips and new perspectives on the subject. Sunny Thakaral - Head of Technology and Communications at The British School New Delhi -, and Abhimanyu Jakhar - Founder of SCOTLE High School - lent us their expertise to tell you all about the how's and why's of digital learning, and the challenges they faced while implementing it.

You will learn about:

What digital resources can bring to your classroom

We don't have to tell you that students today are way more tech savvy than we were at their age. They're all over social media, games, and more platforms than us mere adults can keep up with. Clearly, children are interested in the technology-filled, online world and it has a way of keeping them engaged. Now what would happen if we use all this screen time in an educational way?
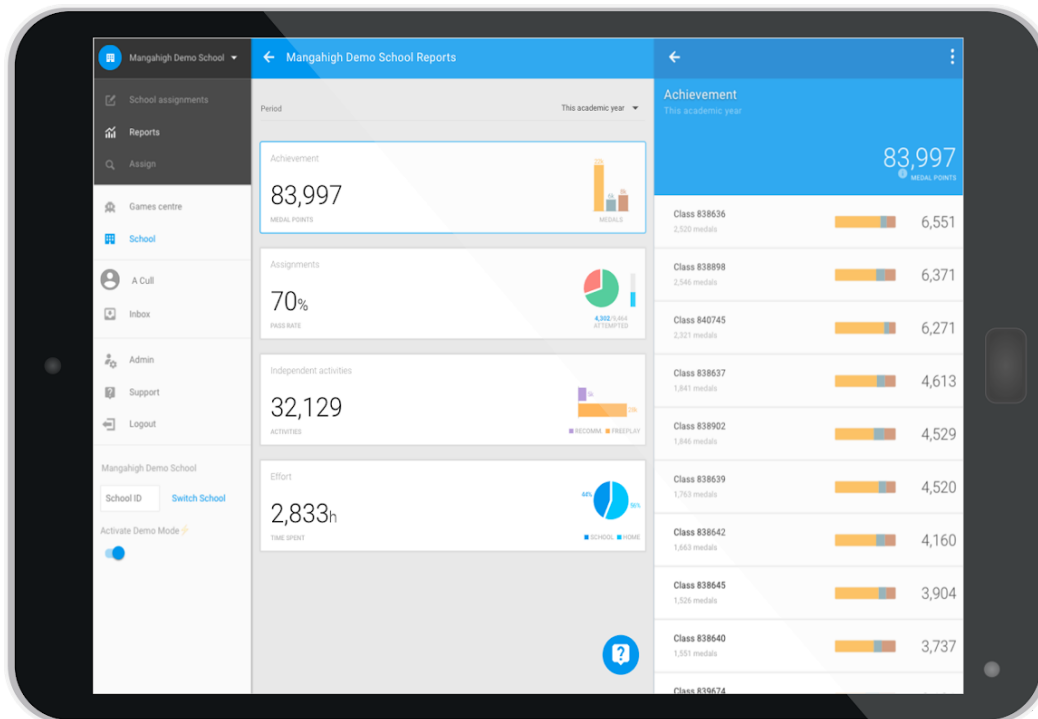
The impact on concentration and engagement

A study by the Scottish Government has shown that the use of digital educational resources has a multitude of positive effects on the learning process of students such as:

- Raised attainment
- Improved efficiency in education
- Less inequality, improved inclusion
- Enhanced parental involvement

A big contributor to these effects is the fact that the use of digital resources give teachers more time to focus on individual students. It personalises learning which results in higher retention and eventually higher grades. These findings are in line with what Sunny Thakral experienced when he implemented technology in the classroom: "Empowering staff to leverage the use of digital resources and platforms which are well established, can take the heavy lifting away from them. This enables teachers to focus more on supporting students rather than on creating and delivering content. Multiple pathways can be created within a lesson which challenges students."

Similarly, Abhimanyu Jakhar saw a huge increase in engagement whilst implementing distance learning: "The kids are absolutely loving the sessions. [...] They get glued to the screens when their teachers are using aids like Powerpoint presentations, Ted Ed, YouTube videos and learning applications like Mangahigh. We have introduced the assessments in Google forms and the kids are totally loving the MCQs and they are very curious to know the immediate result."

Data, data, data!

Not only do digital platforms usually have a structure in place for teachers to easily implement into their lesson plan, but lots of online platforms have a real time reporting functionality as well. Thrakral emphasizes the benefits of real time assessments: "You can leverage the results and use it to target the development goal of students. Teachers love data and we hoard all kinds of it. However, in my experience, not everyone understands how to make the interventions more impactful. Our use of platforms like Mangahigh, Literacy Planet and Firefly, to name a few, over the last few years has led to greater confidence in staff on how to support learning using analytics."

Identifying digital challenges and how to overcome them

Implementing a new learning system will always come with it's challenges, and that goes for digital solutions as well. However, by identifying possible difficulties early on, you can make the transition as easy as can be. Thakral shares the three top tips for a smooth implementation of digital resources:

1. Have a clear vision of what the purpose of virtual learning is for your school. "This will allow you to invest in tools and training suitable to support that vision and also leads to minimal fragmentation and greater consistency across the school."
2. You don't need to reinvent the wheel! "Tap into existing resources and support structures. There's plenty of research out there to show you what platforms will be the best fit for you."
3. Have patience. Not everything needs to be perfect from the get-go. Technology can fail sometimes and especially when learners and teachers are apart, this can be a point of frustration. "Your IT support are your key workers here, collaborate with them to create clear policies and procedures. It will work wonders in the long run."

Bumps in the road will always be there, but there are certainly ways to reduce the impact of them. Jakhar presses the importance of communication with your colleagues on this front: "Our team meets at least 3 times in the week for an hour and half in the evening to discuss each other's problems, the solutions that we have for each other and to share empathy and gratitude with each other. Next to this, I personally do video sessions with them to help overcome any challenge that they are facing in this critical situation."

Remember that the hardest part is the start. Once everyone - you, your colleagues and your students - are accustomed to using online resources, it'll feel normal and you'll be able to reap the benefits for the rest of your teaching career!

Digital teaching techniques

Teaching digitally will grant you opportunities to try out new teaching methods and combine them with the way of teaching you already know. We've created various lesson plans that do just that, which you can implement straight away:

- Blended synchronous learning: use online resources to enable remote students to jointly participate in the same live class. This method starts with using an online platform as an opener to get your students engaged and excited from the start.
- Blended synchronous and asynchronous learning: a blend of teaching techniques. With this strategy, students can learn together online first, and then work independently on their own assignments. These assignments can be set on the online platform or this time can be used as off-screen time.
- Homework only: use online resources as a way to make homework more fun and versatile to keep students engaged and motivated at home.

Mangahigh's own Candace Stump, who has been teaching remotely for the past 12 years, has written a blog which provides further insight into best practices. Candace provides various tips on how to keep your students engaged, how to assess remotely and many more distance learning-related topics.

Let's get started!

Now you know all about digital resources and distance learning, let's get started on implementing them. We'd like to end on giving you three action points to make a start with digital learning:

1. Ask your students what they would like to do. Are there any subjects where they would like to try different types of lessons than what they are having now?
2. Communicate and collaborate with your colleagues to see if they have tried any techniques that you might like too. Remember what Jakhar said: supporting each other is key.
3. Try out two different online learning platforms. Most digital platforms will give you a free trial so you can test to see if it suits you and your students. It's always good to explore a platform before you commit. Click here to try out Mangahigh for free.

We'd like to thank Abhimanyu Jakhar and Sunny Thakaral for their time and amazing advice! Make sure to follow them on Twitter - Abhimanyu Jakhar, Sunny Thakaral - for more useful information.

"My most important reflection of this period is that we can be incredibly adaptive, highly ambitious and quick learners if we display a growth mindset and believe that every crisis is an opportunity to get better. We can uplift humanity by uplifting ourselves." - Abhimanyu Jakhar

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