In November 2014, New York State voters approved the Smart Schools Bond Act (SSBA), which earmarked $2 billion for technology funding in K–12 schools. Funds have since been allocated to public school districts statewide. However, to secure this funding, districts must first complete a Smart Schools Investment Plan (SSIP) outlining how the grant money will be used. As is often the case across the country, such funding can only be used for infrastructure improvements and hardware—not for professional development or training. Consequently, new technologies will flow into schools without the necessary support to implement them well.

Despite the lack of funding for professional development, SSBA requires districts to outline what they plan to do with their allocation, including how they plan to provide professional development to teachers. In the process, districts are required to contact their local city- and state-funded teacher preparation programs to discuss “best practices at the intersection of pedagogy and educational technology” (nysed.gov). As a teacher educator at a state university, I have had the rare opportunity to work closely with several local school districts as they develop plans for technology integration.

As I made observations and shared ideas with teachers and school leaders, I began to rethink the possibilities for preparing teachers (and continuing their education) in the face of such rapid technological change. With each newly adopted app, platform, and device, I also grew wary of proprietary technology corporations’ growing access to the inner workings of schools through data collected on students and educators. A recent visit to one teacher’s classroom, whom I will call Ms. Wonder, revealed that teachers need an opportunity to explore not only the what and how, but also the why behind new educational technologies.

GoGuardian

One afternoon, Ms. Wonder enthusiastically described a new app she had discovered: GoGuardian, which gives students and administrators access to students’ Chromebooks. The app allows educators to log onto their students’ screens anytime, anywhere, to check on their progress. It works by geolocation within the district. Once there, teachers can see students’ screens, shut down and open windows, IM students, and power down students’ devices.

On the one hand, GoGuardian is a promising, powerful classroom management tool. (I could have used another set of eyes when I was a fifth-grade teacher in the early 2000s working with a class of 36 students. This was when the Internet was a brand-new entity in most public schools.) Still, GoGuardian appears to some as educational surveillance; one could argue that it represents a digital panoptification of public schooling. How does GoGuardian help children build an understanding of how the Internet works (or not); and where are all those data going? Further, why must a student’s every digital move be monitored?

As teachers, school leaders, parents, and students consider how to monitor, assess, and archive digital teaching, there are many tools at their disposal. However, we must be diligent in asking where student data are going and for what purpose (Donovan). As with any change in schools, we must give teachers the opportunity to...
implement and assess new educational technology tools and concepts before moving on to the next new, shiny app or gadget (Fullan; Greene).

**Digital Whiplash**

The rapid development and adoption of school software and hardware causes what I call digital whiplash for educators. The bombardment of new ideas and tools leaves little time for effective implementation and evaluation. This digital deluge produces what Michael Fullan calls projectitis or “the presence of too many disconnected, episodic, fragmented, superficially adorned projects” (21). In other words, many teachers are at a loss as for what to do in the face of so much information and so many new products. As a result, there are few opportunities to question the (often hidden) agendas of the companies behind the development of new tech tools (Lynch 4; Roberts-Mahoney et al. 2).

Professional development sessions in Ms. Wonder’s school, for instance, are often so packed with information on how to use new apps or tools that discussions about why teachers are using them rarely take place. When I asked Ms. Wonder what happens to the student data collected through GoGuardian, she said she wasn’t sure and that she hadn’t really thought about it. She went on to explain that the digital saturation for her and her colleagues—and most especially for those who feel out of the digital loop—has grown exponentially since the start of the year, with little time to think about where data might be going.

**What Can/Should Leaders Do?**

As with any other decision, building and district leaders must address the needs of their students first and foremost (Ohanian); given the rapid rate of change today, leaders need to pivot from traditional professional development practices and toward innovative ways to draw on the most powerful resource they have: their teachers (Greene).

**Who is benefiting when you purchase a product? Are researchers and practitioners involved in the conversation, or is it just the edtech industry folks? Who is at the decision-making table, and what is their agenda?**

Teachers’ pedagogical practices improve when they are given the opportunity to collaborate when learning new skills (Britt and Paulus; Gallo-Fox; Thomas) and when they have access to thoughtful, tailored plans of study (Britt and Paulus; Chrysafiadi and Virvou). A handful of innovative practices suggested by research on effective professional development have the potential to cut against the grain of “business-as-usual” (Britt and Paulus; Chrysafiadi and Virvou; Gallo-Fox; Thomas). Recommendations include the following:

- **Pool resources with nearby districts:** School district leaders can form local, state, and regional networks to share resources across and within districts. For example, why can’t a teacher attend a workshop held in a neighboring school district? If educators have the opportunity to attend trainings aligned with their needs and interests, there will be more time left over to think about the why behind the what.

- **Reconsider who the “experts” are:** When making schoolwide or districtwide decisions on curriculum, products, and processes, consider the behind-the-scenes research and players. Who is benefiting when you purchase a product? Are researchers and practitioners involved in the conversation, or is it just the edtech industry folks? Who is at the decision-making table, and what is their agenda? The focus should—and must always be—teaching, learning, and children.

- **Tailor workshop offerings to teachers’ needs:** Provide menus of workshops to teachers for tech-focused training, and have teachers lead professional development. Do not assume that all teachers in any given department or grade need the same information. Differentiate adult instruction as you would expect teachers would for their students.

Trying to avoid technology and its impact on students is impossible as funding initiatives like SSBA push new technologies into public schools. Unless we begin to think more broadly about the why behind the what of technology integration, we will fall prey to projectitis.

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Candidates Announced for Section Elections; Watch for Your Ballot

The Secondary Section Nominating Committee has named the following candidates for Section offices in the NCTE spring elections:

For Members of the Secondary Section Steering Committee (two to be elected; terms to expire in 2022): Keisha Green, University of Massachusetts, Amherst; Jim Kroll, L’Anse Creuse High School North, Macomb, Michigan; Juli Stricklan, Centennial High School, Las Cruces, New Mexico; Megumi Yamamoto, Cheshire High School, Connecticut.

For Members of the Secondary Section Nominating Committee (three to be elected; terms to expire in 2019): Terry Feliz, Hanalani Schools, Mililani, Hawaii; Elena Garcia, Scottsbluff High School, Nebraska; Brian Huot, Kent State University, Ohio; Adrian Nester, Tunstall High School, Dry Fork, Virginia; Melissa Smith, Lake Norman Charter High School, North Carolina; Andrea Zellner, Oakland Intermediate School District, Michigan.

Members of the 2017–18 Secondary Section Nominating Committee are Jalissa Bates, East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana, chair; Susan Barber, Northgate High School, Newman, Georgia; and Hattie Maguire, Novi High School, Michigan.

Lists of candidates for all of the ballots can be found on the NCTE website at http://www2.ncte.org/get-involved/volunteer/elections/.
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