

Innovating with Future Technologies

Keeping our kids ahead of the tech curve

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“The wearable space is hot right now”.
– Evan Luthra, technology entrepreneur

I recently had the pleasure of meeting Evan Luthra, a 19-year-old entrepreneur, (self-educated after his junior year of high school) who is developing wearable applications for major corporations, including some of the largest consumer goods companies in the world.

Evan is the quintessential Digital Native — sporting Google Glass, taking a totally global perspective (he’s a Sikh from India) and branding himself on his stunning web site (evanluthra.com) as a conceptualizer and creator, whose products “you will never forget.” At 19, he is giving speeches to, and working with, major world audiences.

We met at a New York City coffee shop, where I was invited by another entrepreneur interested in working with Evan. I brought along my 9-year-old son, Sky. Since Sky is interested in programming, I thought he’d enjoy meeting Evan and could get some advice — and boy, did he!

When Evan asked Sky (a 4th grader in public school) what programming he was studying Sky answered Java, and in particular Eclipse, and mentioned he was interested in building apps for iPhone and Android. Evan was impressed and gave Sky this helpful advice: “Don’t build them for handhelds, build them for wearables. You need to be thinking ahead.”

In a follow-up email, Evan elaborated:

‘As for your son I would suggest he enter the space of wearables as that's where the world will move to. With the advent of iWatch coming out next January and google and Samsung already launching their own products, the wearable space is hot right now. His interest in mobile apps is justified but that's not the market he needs to be in - it's too crowded for a beginner to break through in. I would be happy to get on Skype with him and assist sometime.’

What do I take away from this exchange for all of us?

1. Educators and schools — and therefore far too many of our students — are several steps behind, rather than ahead of, the technological curve. We're thinking and buying laptops and tablets, when the kids are using handhelds and experimenting with wearables. Although this is not new news, it is not appreciated enough that these technologies that we buy and use today are actually doing little to prepare our students for the future. Our kids need far quicker access to the new technologies that are quickly arriving — at least to *thinking* about innovating with it, and hands-on whenever possible. We have to find a way to help students jump ahead of the curve because we, and they, will never catch up from behind.
2. Since the technology is coming at us so quickly — not just at a faster pace of change, but an *accelerating* one — we need a systematic, thought-out way to keep abreast of the latest: a way that is accessible to all (or at least to most) students.
3. The people who are already at the forward edge of the curve are often very willing, and even anxious, to help.

So what can we do?

I propose that we create (hopefully with the help of the big names – Apple, Google, Facebook, Microsoft, and others) a “course” (or unit, or MOOC, or something new) called “Interacting and Innovating with Future Technologies” (IIFT),

This “activity” — whatever it is called — would run throughout the K-12 years and be offered, online, to every student — at different levels for every grade. It could be taken in any school supplementally, (with, hopefully an in-school volunteer /teacher/sponsor/coach assisting any kid or teacher who wants it.) Or it could be taken at home. The “course” would let kids explore, and innovate with, not today's technologies, but tomorrow's.

Ideally, schools could purchase (and/or get grants for) education-priced versions of many of these technologies: Google Glass, Oculus Rift VR, Fitbit and other wearables, as well

as new technologies now in the R&D labs, and all kids could try them. Kids — all kids with access to You Tube — could watch people like Google Glass’s Astro Teller, Oculus Rift’s John Carmack, Microsoft Research’s Peter Lee, and MIT Media Lab’s Joi Ito, describe and demonstrate the technologies. They could invite kids to imagine educational uses and other uses for these future technologies, holding innovation contests — with the future “stuff” offered as prizes.

Forward-thinking power-users of these new technologies, such as Evan, would volunteer to Skype into groups of students, like Sky and his peers, who are ready to move quickly to the future and are looking for mentors, like-minds and guides..

For many understandable reasons we educators will never get ahead of the technological curve — we will *always* lag behind. But our kids can leapfrog if we help them. Even in places that are “deprived” of money or technology, kids can learn about, and move to, the future.

With an activity, channel or course like “Innovating with Future Technologies” (IFT), where an ever-growing number of curated and contributed videos are supplemented by coaching sessions, collaborative projects, and hands-on experiences with future technologies in various ways that the creators (and the kids) will jointly invent, all kids who are interested in future technology (and have some access to today’s) can leapfrog most of their teachers, and all of their school curricula, into the future.

Want to be an IFT coach?

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