Preface: Beta definitions: establishing what we know

Definition of "BETA" technology
(What we mean when we slap "BETA" onto something.)

+ "Beta" means that most core features are developed but that testing is not complete (both technical and ease of use) and that it is the first time the technology is used by people outside the company. [1]

+ Some software (such as ClassDojo) is in 'alpha' mode, which is earlier than beta. This means that the software is not yet feature-complete, but the creators want to test the core functionality to make sure it is useful, and to determine which direction to build in next.

The Nature of "BETA" technology
1. The beta product might not exist after the beta period
    e.g. overall feedback might not be positive and the startup decides to shut down or work on a totally different product.
2. The product may change drastically after the beta period and turn into something very different from what it was like when it was first being tested.
3. Everything could be going well, but the startup just shuts down. There is always a risk of this happening for a wide variety of reasons.

Section 1: Setting Expectations: Ground Rules for a Better Beta

Teachers are Expected to:
i. Be willing and able to test the technology and provide startups with honest and "sufficient" feedback.
ii. Fully understand the startup's definition of "sufficient feedback" and technology benefits prior to forming partnership,
iii. Use the benefits of the partnership to improve their practice and optimize student learning.

Startups are Expected to:
i. Prior to forming partnership, startup must provide teacher with:
    a. specific and clear definition of "sufficient" feedback, that clearly details minimum time, cost, frequency, and form of feedback.
    b. outline of technology benefits
ii. Form partnerships with teacher, and not a third party representative.
iii. Understand teacher's need to protect student's privacy and *not* request student's images or identifying information.
iv. Assume the teacher is neither a buyer nor sales person.

Section 2: The Goods

Teacher Benefits:
i. Free access to technology that s/he is reviewing.

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[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Software_release_life_cycle#Beta

For startups, "Beta" means that it is the first 'big' deployment of the software to more than just a handful of external people. Startups like to 'release early and release often' by putting out a tiny, tiny early version of their product, to check and see if it is going in the right direction, and then add features on top that are actually useful to users. This release and check strategy prevents them from building a complete product, releasing it, and ultimately finding out most of the features weren't very useful in the first place! Start ups call this approach 'lean startup methodology')

          1a. Terms of benefits should be agreed to on a case by case basis, and understood by both teacher and start up prior to forming partnership.

ii. Opportunity to provide students with greater access to technology

iii. Opportunity to shape the development of classroom centered technology

Startup Benefits:

i. User feedback, which will help the startup create a better product.

ii. Opportunity to create teacher-evangelists to share the product when it is generally available.

Section 3: Beneficial Behaviors and Mindsets

Preface: Startups are flexible, enforcing an expected structure has the potential to kill that advantage. Therefore, this section is simply a *suggested* way to work together.

Beneficial Practices for Startups
Mindsets

+ Entrepreneurs bring very little "rights" to the table, so assume it is our job to convince teachers beyond a reasonable doubt that we have something that will benefit them and their students.
+ Respect a teacher's time and strive to *at least* begin working with them in the summer.
+ Know thyself: you are not a big company, so don't act like one.
+ Care about listening to teachers and acting on insightful, productive feedback.
+ Care about helping students and teachers achieve their highest potential.
+ Acknowledge your power: Technology is not equitably distributed across this country and entrepreneurs should be mindful of their power to provide access to teachers and students who would otherwise have to do without.
+ Understand that teacher's have limited authority and power to make school wide decisions.

Behaviors

+ Have one representative from the startup assigned to the task of communicating with teachers.
+ Help promising teachers partner with other startups. (Share the love)

Beneficial Practices for Teachers
Mindsets

+ Get excited about technology!
+ Recognize your potential to shape the technology for your own benefit and the benefit of other teachers and students.
+ Believe that startups care about helping you and your students
+ Think of yourself as a superhero helping to create classroom centered technology
+ Believe that technology has the potential to:
      * make the teaching profession more sustainable
      * help you and your students achieve your highest potential

Behaviors

+ Take advantage of the chance to speak with people who work tirelessly to make your life better
+ Provide feedback that includes specific examples and details about what works and what doesn't work.
      - think of high quality feedback as the most efficient way to scale your impact on education.
+ Be honest. The best feedback is honest feedback.
+ Respect the entrepreneur's time and be aware of the premium placed on rapid technology innovation.
+ Remind yourself that beta technology is <u>inherently</u> imperfect.

+ Do not expect the entrepreneur or their technology to solve *all* of your problems; at least not right away...
+ Embrace technology and assume it has the potential to help you solve the pitfalls that you see first hand everyday.
+ Help promising startups partner with other teachers. (Share the love)

<u>Additional Considerations</u>
Startups: Understand how past "pilots" were done (e.g. very expensive drawn out affairs with huge companies who could afford to run them for a year or so, with little to no feed back from the front lines.) Learn how traditionally piloted technology was received by teachers in a top-down manner. (e.g. purchased by administrators and heaved upon the shoulders of teachers.) Learn from the past, so you do not repeat it.

Teachers: You can believe that tweets should be reserved for the birds; you can keep on being wary of those who like to discuss their last "google"; However, you cannot let bad experiences with technology prevent you from embracing an opportunity to help shape new educational technology.

Section 4: What Worked: Actions that led to our success

Teacher's Actions:
 1. I was very clear about the needs of my students and did not question my ability or desire to get those needs fulfilled.
2. I saw how each startup, philanthropic foundation, angel investor, venture capitalist and/or pitch session could make a difference in the education of my students.
3. I thought of my relationship with startups as the best and most efficient way for me to scale my impact on education, <u>without</u> having to leave the front lines of the classroom!
4. I took the excitement that comes from recognizing a technology's potential, and turned it into action! My actions included the following:
    a.- created a blog dedicated to recording my mission and intensely detailed and thorough reviews of beta technology
    b. - provided the startups with recorded "think aloud"/ "user tests"
       (you can see one of these at betaclassroom.wordpress.com/full-technology-reviews/class-dojo-full-repor/)
    c. - remained mission driven and focused on bringing technology into my classroom, which gave me every reason to provide each startup with the best feedback possible

Startups' Actions:
> None of the teacher's actions would have occurred if it were not for the genuine interest shown by each of the start ups. The care, interests and respect shown to the teacher will highly influence the quality of feedback you receive in return. Being a teacher is *not* easy. Being a passionate and energetic one is even more difficult. As a startup, your compassionate support of a teacher's interest in beta testing will provide them with the motivation and confidence to provide wonderful and honest feedback about your product. According to the teacher we worked with, our response to her initial email were perfect examples of the tone and care necessary when establishing partnerships with teachers.
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>> **Daniel's Response:** "Wow! I almost fell over when I read your response on my phone. I am so glad that a teacher-entrepreneur like you came across Goalbook",
>>
>> **Brett's Response:** "WOW. What a breath of fresh air. I have to say, it's such a pleasure to see educators like you who are as excited as we are about infusing tech in the classroom.
>>
>> **Sam's Response:** "Wow! I'm thrilled that you're so excited that what we're building could be useful to you. I am also really excited by your entrepreneurial spirit - you seem to have such a progressive classroom! I am in awe!"

Given the infinite number of powerful voices in our society telling teachers that they are a problem, menace and detriment, respect, gratitude and empathy are critical to establishing a successful partnership with a teacher. According to the teacher we worked with, "these guys had me at 'wow'." But its not enough to be respectful and a good listener, you also have to let teachers know when you act on their in put. Teachers love to see how their feedback was used to shape technology, so its all the more beneficial to incorporate them in your subsequent updates and developments.

Section 5: Quantifying Success

Benefit of working with Daniel and Enome Inc.'s Goalbook:
+ Saved Time - 2.5 hours a week that would otherwise be spent tracking down team members, and updating student files by hand.
+ Saves Resources -Reams of paper and entire ink cartridges that I would usually use to write daily updates of my students learning and behavior goals.
+ Improve Teacher's Practice - Allows me to be aware of updates made to my student's goals. I will no longer spend days or weeks tracking goals that are no longer being observed by other team members. It will also allow me to be more aware of patterns in student behavior and aware of any complicating factors.
+ Additional Value - Provides additional analytics of data that I have never been able to produce on my own. Provides me with analytics that give me better insight into my student's current and past success in meeting learning goals, which helps me be a better teacher.

Benefit's of working with Brett and Remind101:
+ Saves Resources - reams of paper and entire cartridges of ink I would have used to make copies of "assignment updates", "what you missed" handouts, and "important reminders".
+ Saves Time - At least 30 minutes every day that I would have otherwise spent creating, photocopying, and distributing reminders and explanations of assignments for students who were absent that day. (As a first year teacher, 23% of my students were absent on any given day)
+ Added Value - Enables me to regularly contact my students without jeopardizing my career, violating my student's right to privacy or exposing my own personal information. Protects my professional relationship with my students while providing me the freedom to use the benefits of social networking technology.
+ Saves Money - I would usually have used my own funds to purchase an assignment book for each of my students.
+ Optimizes Student Learning - Provides my students with reminders that will help them get their assignments done on time and not fall behind if they are absent from school.

Benefit of working with Sam and Class Dojo:
+ Added Value - Freedom of movement! I will no longer will I be forced to choose between standing near my keyboard *or* using a paper seating chart to record student participation points. This application allows me to be where I need to be-with my students, and easily keep track of class participation points. Additionally, the program provided me with an analysis of the feedback I give my students which will help me make better decisions about how I encourage my student's to succeed.
+ Time Saved - 3 hours/week (at least) that I usually would have spent deciphering, entering and analyzing participation point charts at the end of the week! Saves me time in my efforts to contact parents to let them know of their child's successes in class.

+ Improves Teacher's Efficiency and Practice: Gives parents and students access to technology so that parents can access their child's data and see how they performed in class each day.
+ Optimizes Student Learning - Helps make learning more fun for my students and provides them with a better understanding of positive/productive behaviors and choices

Benefits Brett Gained From Successful Partnership

1. You gave REALLY valuable insight as to what we as a company can blog about so the content is actually providing value to teachers, this will help with product marketing and user acquisition
2. From the video, we realized the period between when a user sends a message & it's received is too long. So, we're adding "this may take a few minutes" which will quell users frustration.
3. Sign on was visibly easy (so we didn't have to change anything)
4. You used your phone as a teacher and "pretended" to be a student, this led to us adding a "try it on yourself" so the teacher can test the software and see what their students will be using. Other teachers have loved this small prompt since adding it.
5. Confirmed the multiple "new class" feature without us prompting.
6. It gave me the permission to trust my excitement and really recognize the product's potential. This was probably the MOST helpful. aspect of everything. When you received the message, it's evident in the video that you visibly saw and utilized the value of the product. Reaffirming.

Benefits Sam Gained From Partnership with Ms. Dougherty

1) Told us that we were solving a problem. Speaking with you gave us a strong signal to go ahead with what we were doing - people underestimate the importance of these types of morale boosts.
2) <u>Explicitly</u> told us what was important to you, or what you'd expect. I think your 'stream of consciousness' narration throughout the video really helped us understand what you wanted to do, and therefore what we need to do to fit with your work patterns.[2]
3) <u>Implicitly</u> revealed needs. For example, when you were choosing the T-shirt icon from the negative behavior, you had to scroll through a bunch of icons without knowing when it was going to come up. We're now building a 'lightbox window' so you can choose the icon while looking at the whole set, rather than clicking along until you find it.[3]
4) At numerous points through the video, you highlighted a lot of bugs! This is fantastic because as we are following the lean startup philosophy of 'release early, release often' - and the fact that we've been going for just 4 weeks! - we frequently don't have enough time to catch all the bugs - which is why it's important to have an engaged group of beta testers like you to say 'hmm... that seems weird!'
5) You came to us, without us getting in touch via friends of friends, or other ties. You were doing it off of your own initiative and and talking about their that are important to you. This is a subtle distinction but when it comes to feedback, it means you are very 'mission-driven' and concerned about making this useful for you in your context, because ultimately you want to use it. It is different when someone is using it not only because it is useful, but also because their indirect relationship with us! This meant, I feel, that we got direct, unfiltered feedback - which all startups need more of!!

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[2] For example, at one point you said that 'all programs we use ask me to re-type students names one by one (other than the one which is mandated by the school), so I don't mind doing it again... I do think that there's got to be a way to just paste in a list'. This made us realize that if we're going to be better than other programs, we've got to make something as simple as adding a class list be a really awesome experience. We're now building in a 'copy and paste a list of names' feature, as a direct consequence of your feedback.

[3] A second example of this was when you logged in with your phone, and it took ages to load - you filled in the silence with conversation - you were praising us, which was great haha :p - but which suggested to me that the performance of the web app is too slow.

6) Thoughts on product deployment: as startups, we make assumptions about the environment in which our products will operate. It is awesome to hear from you what actually happens in the classroom, e.g. 'my wireless used to slow down when multiple people at the middle school accessed it'.