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PROVIDING PERSONALIZED SUPPORT TO TEACHERS

The most effective educational technology coaches are not simply great professional developers. While that is a good starting point, teachers need more. They need a *partner*: Someone they can work with to help them find a new strategy or resource. Someone who can be there to bounce teaching ideas back and forth with them. They need a person who is able to be in the room with them as they implement a new strategy or technology. They need someone who will not be judgmental but will support them and help them find a silver lining when they have tried something and it failed.

The basis of being able to offer teachers this kind of support is embedded in the relationship the coach has with the teachers with whom the coach works. The coach cannot be seen as an evaluator or as another administrator. If the teacher is going to be willing to ask for the support the coach can offer, then the teacher needs to know that the edtech coach can be trusted.

The teacher also needs to know that while reflecting on teaching practices, trying—and possibly failing—at new implementations, and talking through classroom struggles and strategies with the coach, these conversations are not being taken back to anyone, especially individuals who are evaluating the teacher. The point of the educational technology coach is to relieve some of the stresses and anxieties that can come with trying new teaching strategies and technologies.

The tricky part is, every teacher is different. Every teacher has a different need and a different preference about how they want to be supported. I have worked with teachers who came to me only for resources. Once they had a solution to the classroom problem they wanted to solve, they would take that solution and run with it. Others wanted more 1:1 support. I would spend time helping them plan, set up the lesson, and model the instructional practice, then move out of the way once they felt comfortable with taking off on their own. Then there were those who were somewhere in between, and some of these preferences can even change according to the topic or focus of the teacher at the time.

The support offered by the edtech coach needs to be personalized to the teacher, but the supports themselves generally fall within these focus areas:

- ✦ research
- ✦ modeling
- ✦ co-planning
- ✦ data analysis and usage
- ✦ co-teaching

Research

I had a conversation with an educational technology coach in which we talked about how we found resources for our teachers. One thing that stood out was a comment made about how she felt she could not spend time during school researching because the administration did not understand that when she was at her computer searching and reading, she was looking for resources for her teachers.

Time and space to research is an important component of the educational technology coach's role. The edtech coach is especially equipped to provide better and more personalized support to teachers when they take the time and space to make research a regular facet of their day-to-day job where they can “keep current with emerging technology and

innovations in pedagogy and the learning sciences” (ISTE Standard for Coaches 2b). The edtech coach will often be asked questions or have requests made to provide input on a specific resource or strategy, or to help provide a technology-related solution to a particular problem. For the times when coaches are faced with instances they are not familiar with or questions to which they do not have a readily available answer, a response of “Let me see what I can find for you” can be the most powerful. Remember, being an edtech coach is *not* about having all the answers. Being an edtech coach is about knowing how to look for solutions and how to process that research so teachers have an ally they can turn to for support in collaboratively solving problems.



ISTE STANDARDS FOR COACHES 2B. Actively participate in professional learning networks to enhance coaching practice and keep current with emerging technology and innovations in pedagogy and the learning sciences.

The role of research for the edtech coach is not solely for solving known problems with teachers. Keeping up-to-date on the latest trends and practices also provides opportunities for coaches to offer strategies that can enhance the learning experience in ways that have not been imagined within the school before. So it is okay for a coach to spend some dedicated time each week to just research pedagogy and emerging technology. Blocking out some time devoted specifically to this is essential to the creation of effective professional development, providing new solutions during co-planning, and offering constructive feedback and support during coaching cycles. It is important to note that while scientific research journals and academic writings are an essential resource, more anecdotal and experiential resources are also effective and often provide a practical application that is easier to relate back to the classroom environment. A collaborative list of resources and research, including Twitter hashtags and blogs, can be found at edtechcoachingprimer.com.

Co-Planning

Co-planning was always my favorite part of being an educational technology coach. I still enjoy planning instruction with teachers and the edtech coaches I currently work with. Co-planning gives those involved the opportunity to collaborate on the creation of a lesson or unit. That collaboration allows for learning experiences to be reimaged and made more impactful, while giving the coach the ability to provide support as a

learning designer. Whether the co-planning session leads to a modeling or co-teaching experience, or it is a standalone activity, the coach is there to support the teacher—or even a small group of teachers—with:

- ✦ developing active learning experiences for students,
- ✦ promoting student agency within the lesson,
- ✦ implementing the appropriate digital tool to assess learning and provide timely feedback,
- ✦ accommodating learner variability, and
- ✦ incorporating digital citizenship into curricula for authentic experiences.



ISTE STANDARDS FOR COACHES 4A. Collaborate with educators to develop authentic, active learning experiences that foster student agency, deepen content mastery and allow students to demonstrate their competency.



ISTE STANDARDS FOR COACHES 4B. Help educators use digital tools to create effective assessments that provide timely feedback and support personalized learning.

The co-planning meetings themselves need to be more than a brainstorming session. There needs to be a completed product at the conclusion of the collaboration, whether that takes one or multiple sessions. Coming prepared and maintaining focus on the task at hand is important, as time is a precious commodity during the school day. Utilizing a structure for these collaborations can ensure the time spent co-planning is productive and effective.

Before the Co-Planning Meeting

Once a teacher or teachers has scheduled a co-planning meeting, it is important to make sure the goals of the session are understood and the coach has enough awareness of the lesson or unit's focus to be able to pull some preliminary research, notes, or technology resources. Sending the teacher(s) a quick questionnaire in an email or asking a few questions informally



BEFORE CO-PLANNING
SESSION QUESTIONS

prior to the meeting can help build that necessary understanding of what to expect when heading into the co-planning session. Following are four questions that can provide enough background for preparations.

1. What standards will this lesson/unit focus on?
2. Is this a lesson/unit we will build from scratch, or is this an existing lesson we are looking to improve? (If it is a lesson that is being improved, request access to past lesson plans.)
3. Is there any specific element of this lesson you want to focus on?
 - Assessment of the standards
 - Active learning
 - Differentiation
 - Incorporating digital citizenship
 - Development of a learning environment
 - Other _____
4. Are there any specific web resources, applications, or technologies that you were wanting to try within this lesson/unit?

Be mindful that these questions are flexible, as are the suggested checklist items for number 3. If there is a specific school or professional learning goal that needs to be addressed here, adding a question or suggested list item is appropriate. Also consider that adding too many questions can be more work than is necessary on the teacher(s). The goal is always to make these personalized supports as useful to the teachers as possible without adding unnecessary burdens or requirements to their plates. The simple responses elicited by these questions should not take more than a couple minutes to construct and will save time during the co-planning session, making the collaboration more productive.

During the Co-Planning Meeting

There is a tricky balance to maintain during any 1:1 or small group planning session (for simplicity, the rest of this section is written as if co-planning were taking place with a single teacher, even though it is also common practice to do this with multiple teachers who may be working on a similar lesson together). There needs to be time

and space to brainstorm and play with ideas, but at some point decisions need to be made, plans need to be drafted, and a final product needs to be established so preparations can be made to implement the plans. Structuring the steps of the session can be helpful to keep the planning on track and productive. Table 4.1 is a suggested protocol for such a planning session. The example is of a ninety-minute session (ten minutes left out to account for expected overage). The times listed are rough estimates and can be adjusted to reflect needs. Some collaborations—especially collaborations that are planning entire units—can take longer and require stretching this protocol out to multiple meetings.



CO-PLANNING AGENDA

TABLE 4.1 Sample Agenda for Co-Planning Session

TIME ESTIMATE	FOCUS	NOTES
10 minutes	Teacher talks it out	
10 minutes	Successes and struggle points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students in the class • past implementations of the lesson/unit 	
5 minutes	What I heard	
5 minutes	Define goals	
10 minutes	What-ifs	
15 minutes	Draft	
15 minutes	Walk through and adjust	
10 minutes	Plan next steps	

Teacher Talks It Out

A teacher who is looking to co-plan has no doubt thought about the lesson or unit in some way prior to the meeting. It is important to let teachers talk through all of the thoughts they have had about the lesson. This allows teachers to lead the discussion and provides the coach with a better understanding of what teachers are looking for as far as outcomes for the collaboration.

Success and Struggle Points

When planning with a teacher—especially if it is a new partnership—it is good to get a sense of any successes the teacher has had with the students for whom the lesson is being designed. It is equally necessary to understand any struggles the teacher has with this class (it could be something as simple as the students having a lack of focus because it is the last class of the day). Information like this could lead to discussions of how to bring in more high-energy active learning strategies that engage students in the content through physical movement. If the lesson or unit is something that the teacher has used before, having the same reflective conversation about the successful elements and those that the teacher felt were a struggle can provide the coach information about resources that already exist and provide some jumping-off points as the lesson is redesigned.

What I Heard

There is nothing more frustrating than participating in a meeting where one person has completely misunderstood the thoughts and intentions of the other. Now that the teacher has shared the ideas or vision about the lesson/unit and reflected on the successes and struggles, the coach can prevent misunderstandings by making an “I heard” statement. This approach allows coaches to lay out what they heard a teacher say and gives teachers an opportunity to clear up any misunderstandings about what they are looking to accomplish through the co-planning experience.

Define Goals

At this point in the conversation, defining or just simply restating the goal or goals for the lesson or unit being planned can bring back the focus needed to begin moving forward. Write the goals down and make it easily viewable while designing the plan so it can remain the focus throughout the rest of the co-planning session.

What-ifs

Here is a chance to take all that information—the teacher’s shared reflection and experiences, plus the coach’s understanding and experience—and really look at some options for creating a stellar lesson or unit. Just start with the words “What if . . . ?” and brainstorm from there. This could be done as a timed activity or just used as a conversation starter. Write everything down, no matter how big or impossible it may seem, as long as it associates with the goal.

Draft

With everything out on the table and all of the brainstormed ideas out for everyone to see and process, it is time to draft the plan. What will assessment look like? How will you get students ready to show understanding? What activity will be first? Second? How will you ensure understanding throughout? All of these questions go into planning any lesson, and co-planning is no different.

Walk Through and Adjust

As the coach and the teacher complete the draft of the lesson/unit, walk through the steps of the lesson delivery. If this is a precursor to a co-teaching experience, this is a good time to assign roles and define who will be doing what, when, and with which students. Make adjustments to the lesson and touch up materials or resources that will be used by the teacher and the students during the lesson.

Plan Next Steps

Now that the lesson or unit is planned, what preparations need to be made? If this is a co-teaching scenario, who will take responsibility for that? This is also a good time to schedule a reflection session that takes place after the implementation of the lesson or unit.

After the Co-Planning Meeting

While co-planning can be something that happens on its own, there are often missed opportunities when the co-planning experience is not followed up with co-teaching, modeling, observation, reflection, or a combination of these. The continued support

that comes with co-teaching and modeling can provide teachers with a partner in the classroom, while observation and/or reflection can provide more in-depth knowledge about what strategies are effective, how to improve them, and what other support needs the teacher may have.

Modeling

Seeing or experiencing something as it happens is a powerful learning strategy. When teachers are asked to implement strategies they are not familiar with, it can be frustrating because they may not have had the chance to see or experience these strategies firsthand. This is why modeling is such an important element of the educational technology coach's role. Modeling can happen in a few different places:

- ✦ professional learning sessions
- ✦ within the classroom alongside students
- ✦ lesson design
- ✦ their own professional learning
- ✦ digital citizenship



ISTE STANDARDS FOR COACHES 4D. Model the use of instructional design principles with educators to create effective digital learning environments.

Professional learning sessions are a perfect place to model good instructional practices. Teachers need the opportunity to see different teaching and learning strategies in action. By placing teachers in the position of the learners and asking them to engage in their learning differently, teachers are able to better understand how students would feel in that learning structure.

Within the Classroom Alongside Students

Modeling in the classroom is different from co-teaching. While co-teaching requires the teacher and coach to plan and implement the lesson together, modeling within a classroom indicates that the educational technology coach is taking on the responsibility of

teaching the lesson or unit for a specific class or a defined amount of time. This is most effective when the teacher has co-planned the lesson and understands what the goals of the lesson are. The lesson itself is implemented by the coach, but the teacher is in the room to observe.

This tactic is especially effective if the coach is working with the teacher on understanding how a practice can be implemented. Modeling can allow the teacher a way to see the strategy in action. When this is done in professional learning (as previously described in this chapter), the teacher may still question whether the strategy is truly usable with students. The coach can model the strategy with students so the teacher can see and grasp how utilization of that strategy can be accomplished. Once the teacher has observed the strategy, the coach can have the teacher implement the strategy either in a co-teaching scenario or solo. The coach can provide support by being present and observing, which can lead right into a formal coaching cycle.



ISTE STANDARDS FOR COACHES 3D. Personalize support for educators by planning and modeling the effective use of technology to improve student learning.

The ISTE Standards for Students and the ISTE Standards for Educators have been adopted by a number of states around the country. Modeling the implementation of these standards can happen both in professional learning and when co-planning lessons with teachers. When creating professional learning sessions, consider sharing the professional lesson planning document with teachers. Post the ISTE Standards for Educators and the ISTE Standards for Students that the methods you are utilizing during the training would meet if you were implementing those methods within a student lesson. While co-planning lessons alongside teachers, help them to align their plans with the ISTE Standards for Students. These actions, while they may seem small, will help to keep the technology alignment standards provided by ISTE in front of teachers and help them to understand how you are supporting teachers with their standards alignment. These actions will also demonstrate what methodologies can be used to meet some of the standards they are asked to meet with their students.

In the Edtech Coach's Professional Learning

Modeling by the educational technology coach continues beyond teaching and the creation of lesson plans. Edtech coaches should model the attitude of lifelong learners through continuous personal goal setting, participation in professional learning networks, and taking on learning challenges to help them grow in their coaching practices. If the coach is responsible for helping to support the growth of the teachers, there should be intentionality in making sure the *coach* is focused on growing, as well. There are more detailed information and resources for this in chapter 8.

Digital Citizenship

Digital citizenship is a life necessity. Thinking critically about the media that we and our students consume, the information we give away, and the exchanges we have with others online is not something that should be taught in a vacuum. These lessons and conversations should be taking place daily and in the context of every interaction that is had in the digital environment. This can be modeled by the educational technology coach through each lesson created or cocreated, each coaching conversation, and each resource conversation with teachers.



ISTE STANDARDS FOR COACHES 7B. Partner with educators, leaders, students and families to foster a culture of respectful online interactions and a healthy balance in their use of technology.



ISTE STANDARDS FOR COACHES 7D. Empower educators, leaders, and students to make informed decisions to protect their personal data and curate the digital profile they intend to reflect.

In lesson design and delivery, the coach can remind learners of online norms that are relevant to the environment they are working in. For example, “Remember, when you are posting comments to your classmates’ work, you need to keep in mind how you word your responses. The tone of your writing is important. We are a team, and we want to support each other in our learning journey.” During coaching conversations, the edtech coach can relate opportunities for these exchanges to take place during

the lessons that were observed. And when sharing resources with teachers, take a moment to explain how the resource protects student data privacy and how the teacher can integrate digital citizenship activities and conversations as students begin using the resource.

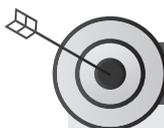
Co-Teaching

Co-teaching is not something that has to happen after a lesson is co-planned, but co-planning should happen *before* a co-teaching experience. Co-teaching is a partnership between the coach and the teacher, where each of these individuals takes responsibility for implementing the planned lesson. This is not simply providing “tech support” to students while they try a new technology. In a true co-teaching environment, the educational technology coach will support instruction through the same methods the classroom teacher would implement. For example, a planned lesson may incorporate blended learning through the use of stations. With a co-teacher, this could become even more effective, as one individual could provide students with a small group lesson while the other facilitates student exploration of a topic in another station.



ISTE STANDARDS FOR COACHES 3A. Establish trusting and respectful coaching relationships that encourage educators to explore new instructional strategies.

A co-teaching experience can help to “encourage educators to explore new instructional strategies” (ISTE Standard for Coaches 3a). A teacher who has only used direct instruction methods, individual assignments, or grouped students to complete the same task at the same time may hesitate to try something like a station rotation blended learning model. With the edtech coach acting as a co-teacher in these types of instances, the teacher can feel more confident and able to implement this type of learning experience, allowing for the teacher to begin to utilize these strategies without the coach.



MAKING AN AMAZING LESSON THROUGH COLLABORATION

Connie Wolf, Instructional Technology Facilitator

“What’s new out there? We want some spice.”

Our seventh-grade science teachers had hit a wall. They had taught body systems before, and each time students turned in the same surface-level Google Slides. So in an effort to increase engagement, they asked their instructional technology facilitator (me) and librarian (Gabriel) how their students could make podcasts, screencasts, and videos of what they would learn.

Gabriel and I met with the seventh-grade science team, and since they already had ideas about what products they wanted students to create, we began by asking about the lessons leading up to the final project. What was the big idea they wanted the projects to capture? What had students struggled with in previous body system units? The answer was surprising: Students weren’t engaging deep enough with the material. They weren’t grasping that all body systems were interconnected and that diseases affecting one body system would affect others.

Providing more final product options wasn’t going to address these issues, so we paused our discussion about podcasts, screencasts, etc. and began brainstorming. To increase the depth of their knowledge base, we decided to give students more time to research individual body systems (using databases recommended by Gabriel and an online simulation recommended by me). Students would complete research in groups, and after everyone had become an expert on one body system, they would teach other groups about that system. In these “jigsaw” groups, students would be able to compare notes and discover the ways their systems connected. To further prompt them to discuss the systems’ interdependence, though, we decided that students’ motivation for their jigsaw would be an impending disease.

At the time of the unit, Thanos had just dusted half the population in *Avengers: Infinity War*. So, being Marvel fans, we put together a trailer where Thanos threatened to dust the body if students didn’t sacrifice one of its systems. To help us develop the structures that students would use to debate, negotiate, and make a plan for defeating this “disease,” I recruited a seventh-grade social studies teacher. He was happy to teach students about diplomacy in his class (as well as play Thanos in our trailer!). This allowed the students to think about and connect ideas across curricular barriers. The social studies teacher’s contribution meant the science teachers could, as they put it, focus on “[guiding] students to the conclusion that all . . . body systems work together to enable us to function properly.”

By the end of the unit, the science team observed that “more . . . students were able to reach the correct conclusion [by completing this project] than when [they, as teachers,] used a previous project.” The design changes—made when co-planning with Gabriel, the science teachers, our social studies teacher, and me—had produced deeper student understanding, in addition to a series of creative, interdisciplinary learning experiences we were all proud to have a hand in.

Data Analysis and Usage

For many, *data* is a four-letter word that does not inspire excitement. In my second year as an educational technology coach, my principal came to me and asked that I lead the school's data team. I took the position, but in all honesty, I wasn't sure what I was expected to do. With her guidance, however, and a fantastic team of teachers, we were able to agree on the utilization of an action research cycle that we would adapt to meet our school's need for a data cycle. From there, we were able to break down the steps for gathering data, analyzing it, and adjusting instruction according to the findings. It was a great learning process for me and gave me a deeper appreciation for the critical role data plays in implementing blended, differentiated, and personalized learning environments. This is why the educational technology coach should be situated to support teachers in their use of data in the classroom.



ISTE STANDARDS FOR COACHES 6B. Support educators to interpret qualitative and quantitative data to inform their decisions and support individual student learning.

Because the educational technology coach is in a position that is non-evaluative, teachers may be more willing to honestly share their classroom data with the coach. This gives the edtech coach the opportunity to work with the teacher to establish data norms that can help influence instructional practices. A great resource for understanding how to coach teachers in the use of data to promote better student outcomes is *The Data Coach's Guide to Improving Learning for All Students* (Love, 2008). This resource provides in-depth discussion not only about coaching teachers through data but also the establishment and utilization of data teams at the school level for overall school improvement. However, the educational technology coach doesn't necessarily have to go to the extent of full-fledged data coaching, which is a job in itself.



ISTE STANDARDS FOR COACHES 6A. Assist educators and leaders in securely collecting and analyzing student data.

Instead, the edtech coach can focus on instructional strategies that promote blended learning, differentiation, and personalization in student learning. The creation of assessments that provide effective data, which is needed to create and sustain these learning environments, is where the coach can focus. This approach is a little less clinical, and starting from the practical need for implementing the different instructional practices can help keep teachers more excited at the prospect of assessing student learning than they would be to analyze student data.



ISTE STANDARDS FOR COACHES 6C. Partner with educators to empower students to use learning data to set their own goals and measure their progress.

Understanding and using data is not something only the teacher can learn. As the coach guides teachers to better understand how to collect and use their collected data to support student learning, they can also provide the teachers with resources and support for students to use data themselves. This can empower students not only to track their own progress, but to better understand how to set personal learning goals for themselves.

Professional Development Checklist

- Build a positive relationship with teachers, one that is non-evaluative and trusting.
- Research:
 - Block out time in the week to conduct research.
 - Adopt the attitude of “If I don’t know it, I can find it for you.”
- Co-planning:
 - Before co-planning, ask simple and relevant questions to help prepare for the co-planning meeting.
 - During co-planning, provide the teacher space to talk out thoughts and discuss successes and struggles.
 - During co-planning, stay focused on the goals established for the lesson or unit.
 - After co-planning, offer additional support through modeling, co-teaching, observation, or reflection.
- Model:
 - Best instructional practices during professional learning
 - Lessons with students while the teacher observes
 - The implementation of technology and technology standards in lesson plans
 - What it is to be a life-long learner
 - Digital citizenship for teachers and students
- Co-teach:
 - When the lesson was co-planned
 - As a way to support the teacher with implementation of a new strategy
 - As a way to support the teacher with a learning experience that is larger than one teacher
- Data analysis and usage:
 - Situate data analysis and usage so it supports the instructional practices being implemented by teachers.