Edtech Coach: How to get the most out of classroom observations

Description



In this blog post, I will discuss best practices for classroom observations, how to collect information, and how to utilize technology to enhance communication and collaboration during and after observations. The focus is a teacher-driven, peer observation model (Grimm et al., 2014), emphasizing collaboration and learning. The observation phase can be a learning experience for both the Edtech coach and the partner teacher, enhancing professional development and, at the same time, providing opportunities for

improving lessons, which will further benefit the students in achieving their learning goals (McBride, 2021). Consequently, it is essential to adequately prepare for classroom observations and establish clear, mutually agreed-upon goals in advance to effectively link observations with lesson improvement.

Question: How can an Edtech coach gather information by observing the partner teachersâ?? lessons and collaborating to improve them?

Solution:

Pre-observation meeting

The teacher must take the lead in setting a focus for the classroom observation during a pre-observation meeting, sharing relevant background information about the upcoming lesson. The coaching process aims to empower teachers to initiate and lead the change process, not just be part of it like the traditional evaluative observations. During the pre-observation meeting, it is important to clearly define the observationâ??s purpose, whether student engagement, instructional strategies, or classroom management, to guide the process effectively (Grimm et al., 2014). There should be a collaborative discussion on lesson goals and strategies, setting the stage for effective post-observation discussions.

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Observation

The actual observation phase involves collecting data without preconceived perceptions, emphasizing interactions between the teacher and students. Take notes, bring checklists, find out if audio or video recordings are possible, and use peer observation forms (Grimm et al., 2014). Also, maintain the integrity of the observation process to build trust. Observations should only occur with the teacherâ??s consent, and feedback should remain confidential and strictly used for professional development rather than evaluative purposes. Maintain a non-intrusive presence to ensure a natural teaching environment that accurately reflects the teacherâ??s methods (Baker, 2023). Concentrate on specific aspects of the lesson, avoiding overwhelming feedback with excessive information. Focus areas include classroom dynamics, student interactions, and the effectiveness of instructional materials. Student data can be truly beneficial in improving classroom instruction. â??The learning space is an open and democratic forum where things get to be changed if need be or maintained and improved when necessary (Barnes, 2021)â?•.

Post-observation meeting

After the lesson, you can review your notes or recordings and prepare questions or comments for the post-observation meeting. The post-observation debrief is a collaborative process where the teacher and observer analyze the data to understand its implications, specifically regarding the teacherâ??s lesson focus (Grimm et al., 2014). During the post-observation meeting, staying descriptive while sharing collected data is crucial. Staying descriptive is a challenging yet powerful skill in teacher-driven observation, fostering a richer foundation for discussion by presenting data without premature conclusions. This collaborative effort emphasizes a constructive, growth-oriented approach to professional development (Grimm et al., 2014). Stay positive, and highlight both strengths and areas for improvement with constructive feedback supported by specific examples. Collaborate with the teacher to set goals for improvement and develop a practical action plan. Encourage using coaching cycles, which engage teachers in an ongoing cycle of setting goals, co-planning and implementing lessons, and debriefing afterward. â??Itâ??s a very intentional reflection and feedback loop that allows the

coach to deeply personalize the professional learning (McBride, 2021).â?•

Tips for using technology during observations and improving lessons

- Capture the entire lesson with video recording tools, enabling a detailed review of teaching methods and student dynamics (Grimm et al., 2014).
- Explore apps facilitating real-time data collection and streamlining documentation of specific behaviors or instructional strategies (OpenAI, 2023).
- Implement digital surveys or feedback forms for students to provide anonymous input on the lesson, offering insights into engagement and comprehension (Barnes, 2021).
- Use technology to leverage data analysis to identify patterns and trends in student performance, informing adjustments to instructional strategies.
- Incorporate formative assessments during lessons using digital tools for assessing student understanding.
- Explore online resources focused on integrating technology into teaching practices, sharing them with teachers to enhance their skills. Implement digital portfolios for students to showcase their work, providing a comprehensive view of their progress over time.
- Explore adaptive learning platforms that tailor content to individual student needs, providing personalized insights into their strengths and weaknesses (Retrieved from ISTE website).
- Utilize collaborative document platforms like Google Docs or Microsoft Word Online for shared lesson planning and resource creation (Baker, 2023).
- Participate in online PLCs to share insights, resources, and best practices with educators beyond the immediate school community (McBride, 2021).

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Conclusion:

Classroom observations are invaluable for teacher development and lesson improvement, providing insights into instructional practices. Edtech coaches and educators can create a dynamic and collaborative learning environment by combining effective class observation practices, technology tools, student data collection, and strategies for communication and collaboration. Embracing these best practices and tips fosters a culture of growth, collaboration, and innovation in the classroom, ultimately enhancing the learning experience for educators and students (McBride, 2021). As stated in *ISTE-C Standard 3: Collaborator: Coaches establish productive relationships with educators in order to improve instructional practice and learning outcomes. Coaches: a. Establish trusting and respectful coaching relationships that encourage educators to explore new instructional strategies. d. Personalize support for educators by planning and modeling the effective use of technology to improve student learning. ISTE-C Standard 4: Learning Designer: Coaches model and support educators to design learning experiences and environments to meet the needs and interests of all students. Coaches: a. Collaborate with educators to develop authentic, active learning experiences that foster student agency, deepen content mastery and allow students to demonstrate their competency.* When the coaching relationship focuses on support, it can enhance and enrich teaching and learning, resulting in improved outcomes. By observing and reflecting on teaching practices, providing specific and actionable feedback, offering ongoing support and collaboration, and encouraging teacher reflection and self-assessment, Edtech coaches can empower educators to refine their practice and foster a culture of continuous growth.

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