Details

Expert Insights From an Innovation Coach With Jessica Holloway -242
In this episode, I spoke with Innovation Coach Jessica Holloway, all about her role supporting teachers with PBL, STEM education, and EdTech integration. You'll hear Jessica share valuable advice for educators interested in taking on a similar coaching role. She emphasizes the importance of embracing risk, stepping out of your comfort zone, and adopting the role of a lead learner.

Link to live show notes: https://classtechtips.com/2023/11/21/innovation-coach-242/
* Innovation Coach

Introduction

Hello there, my name is Monica Burns and welcome to today's episode of the Easy EdTech Podcast! I'm a former NYC public school teacher and started the Easy EdTech Podcast in 2019 to share my favorite tips, tricks and strategies for technology integration. You'll hear stories from my time in the classroom, the work I do now with schools and districts, and my travels to different EdTech events. Each episode is designed to give you ideas you can try yourself, share with a colleague, or bookmark for later in the school year — so don't forget to head to my website classtechtips.com/podcast for all of the show notes and resources from today's episode. If you're listening to this episode on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or Google Podcasts, or another podcast player you'll see the show notes link in the description, too.

Promotion/Reminder

This episode is sponsored by Ozobot. Ozobot is redefining the role of robotics in education with award-winning programmable robots, patented screen-free coding programs, and STEAM-based learning solutions that transform the way students learn and create across all grades, subjects, and environments. And here's the exciting news: from Friday, November 24th through Monday, November 27th, Ozobot is offering up to 50% off on select products, including the Evo Entry Kit with Evo, their award-winning coding robot. Don't miss out on this incredible opportunity to supercharge your classroom with these exciting learning solutions. Just visit shop.ozobot.com starting this Friday, November 24th to shop and save!

Today's Intro

This week's episode is titled: "Expert Insights from an Innovation Coach *with Jessica Holloway*." Jessica is an Innovation Coach and after chatting a bit at the ASCD Leadership Conference in Texas last month, I knew she would be able to offer podcast listeners a behind-the-scenes look at her role as an innovation coach, along with some insights into hot topics like AI in education. Jessica has lots of gems to share and I can't wait for you to hear from her. Let's jump into the conversation.

Episode Transcript

Monica Burns:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm so excited to chat about your role as an innovation coach, things that you're seeing, things that you're excited about. But before we get into all of that, can you share with us a bit about what your day-to-Day looks like?

Jessica Holloway:

That's a interesting question to ask because my day-to-day and my week to week never looked the same. It is very specific to the needs of the schools in which I'm working with. So one week might be, Monday is PBL planning at a specific school with teachers all day. The next day it may be planning for an upcoming professional development with teachers. Then Wednesday it may be personal planning time, and then a team meeting. Thursday would be PD with computer science teachers in K five. And then Friday is a stem STEM leadership meeting with some educators in the school. So really my weeks and days look vastly different. But that's the exciting part of my job is that I really do get to personalize and customize the work that I do to meet the needs of those specific schools, students, teachers that I'm working with.

Monica Burns:

Yeah. And I can imagine that that's something that gets you into lots of different conversations, <laugh>, lots of different places, kind of getting some of those big picture ideas of what everyone is doing and, and bringing it back to the stakeholders that you support. So, you know, today we're talking about your role as an innovation coach, which may be a term that listeners are super familiar with or they might not be quite sure what that entails. But how did you transition into this role? What skills do you think were really essential for success?

Jessica Holloway:

For success? Yeah. So if you would've asked me 10 years ago, where do you see yourself, this would not have been the answer, <laugh>. I started out as a language arts teacher and I thought I was on the literacy path that was gonna be my direction. However, I am a professional development fan. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So I go to a lot of PDs and I go to a lot of learning experiences that were outside of traditional language arts, professional development. So I got curious about EdTech and this opportunity of a STEM fellowship. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> with public Ed Education Foundation, a local organization in, in Chattanooga. And I was like, I wanna, I wanna try that. I wanna see what STEM's about. And so ironically, I went around and asked all of the science to math teachers first if they were applying.

Jessica Holloway:

'Cause I didn't wanna take their spot. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. Which seems so silly now. Yeah. But I really didn't feel like I belonged because I didn't see myself in the letters of stem. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So I applied, got in, and I was like, I started to understand STEM was more than just the letters. It's a way of thinking. It's a way of problem solving. And I was like, that belongs in my language arts classroom. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. So I really started cultivating it there. Moved into an instructional school-based coach position, and continued that love of like learning and stem and how can we redesign these learning experiences. And then my principal and I participated in an Innovative leaders institute. And the state of Tennessee has a STEM designation process. Mm-Hmm.

Jessica Holloway:

And we were like, yes, we want that for the school. So going through that process expanded my skillset and understanding of STEM and school-wide change. And as that evolved, I found myself spending more time doing innovative things around STEM and and instructional technology. And this position was posted at, I'm part of the innovation team to support STEM across the district, innovative practices. And so when I saw this position was available, it's like, that sounds exactly like what I would love to do <laugh>. So let's see where this can go. Now I will say my role has, it's in the fourth year and it's probably in its fourth iteration of what it looks like. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. But it continues to refine and be revised to meet the needs of the schools in our district. And I think that's what I like so much about it is because it is responsive Yeah.

Jessica Holloway:

To what the needs are currently. And so it's not a static, I mean there's generalized job description, but it's not a static. This is the one thing. Let's look at the things that are going to move student learning forward. Are there new ways of doing this? How might we redesign learning experiences to build those college and career readiness skills, connect to the community, empower those students to be owners of their learning. So it's a lot of co-creation, being a thought partner. Sometimes I feel like my title should be idea pollinator. Mm-Hmm. <Laugh> because I'm in so many schools that I'll take a great idea here, share it there. And that also allows me to get schools connected across the district. We're kind of a large district. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> you could drive an hour top, bottom and across and still be in the same district.

Jessica Holloway:

So some schools never really talk to each other, but I find that they're doing something very similar and they could be collaborating and making the work lighter. And so I try to do that as well as connect them. And sometimes it's also connecting our elementary schools to high schools. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> and letting them work collaboratively on a project. And some of those high schoolers being the experts to the younger, younger learners. So I feel like I'm a bridge builder, idea, pollinator, collaborative, problem solver, cheerleader. It depends on what the day is I take. I don't mind doing all those roles 'cause it, I feel energized when I go in and I get to work with the schools.

Monica Burns:

Yeah. And gosh, as you're, you know, talking there that I love that idea. Poller, it's such a great visual, right? That you are seeing all these great things. You're spreading a word about work that's happening across the district. You're supporting people in a responsive way. And you know, as you were sharing too, I mean, we just saw each other at the ASCD leadership conference last month. Right. Thinking about professional development. Right. And your love, or both of our loves, I should say, probably for professional development. Right. You know, those are the kind of things where, you know, the most effective PD is responsive. Right. Is evolving. And I love that you, you know, incorporated that so clearly into even your own description of your role, especially since it has innovation <laugh> Right. In the title, right. That you're innovating and that you're thinking about, you know, how to support everyone. And when it comes to EdTech or you know, education technology, what are some best practices that you've adopted for supporting EdTech integration in the schools that you work with?

Jessica Holloway:

I really try to focus on what it is that they want accomplished with the EdTech tool. Mm-Hmm. Because Sometimes

Jessica Holloway:

We get excited about a tool 'cause it looks neat and it's exciting and we try to force fit it. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. And it may not be the right tool. So a lot of times it's what do we want students to do? Or how might this tool enhance what they're already doing? And then it's finding the right tool for that for that task. And so I don't let, I don't like to say I'm the Debbie Downer, but sometimes I pump the brakes on things Oh yeah. Mm-Hmm. Where they're just like, I just saw I was on Instagram or on TikTok and I saw this tool and I've got to use it. And I like the excitement of wanting to try something new. But it needs to be intentional use of what you're doing. Yeah. Because every, every time you use a tool, there is time that you have to acclimate students to how you use this tool.

Jessica Holloway:

What is, so it is an investment of time and we've gotta be intentional. But those choices with our time in our classroom, 'cause it's, it's always the thing we never have enough of. So really thinking about outcome that you want and matching the right tool. And then it's just helping them build their comfort level and expertise in order to use the tool. And I'm a big fan of purposeful play with adults. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And so I want you to just experience it with no risk, no purpose other than click the buttons, try the things, mess it up, and go, go through it as a learner because it will build empathy for your students when you are asking them to do it. But then it also also lets you anticipate problems or obstacles your students might face, which if you plan for those, will help you be more efficient with your time. So there's a lot of intentionality in using EdTech in the classroom.

Monica Burns:

Yeah. And, you know, as you are, you know, I, and I wanna ask you about AI in a moment too. You know, as you were saying, you know, about press all the buttons, right? Like, I think that's something I've been saying a lot in workshops I've led, you know, around introducing a tool like ChatGPT or something, right? Like press all the buttons, like choose your own adventure, like try this out. It's the only way that you're gonna really gather ideas for how this connects back to your work. And I think your reminder is so key for listeners too. Like especially in your

role where I'm sure people are coming to you right? Or you're coming across things that are bright and shiny, <laugh> and exciting right there is that like, okay, what's the intention here? Do I already have a tool in my tool belt that has these features?

Monica Burns:

Like, do the kids already know how to get into something? Right. That has single sign. Like all those things that I'm sure you know, come up that, although it might feel like that Debbie Downer, I'm sure sometimes it really is something that is a great reminder for people to, you know, optimize their time and that they might have something that they've kind of tossed aside, you know, in their tool belt that is worth revisiting right now that they have some different contacts or they've come across another tool that kind of does the same thing. So, you know, if you are talking about your role to, you know, friends, colleagues, or listeners here, you know, of the podcast, what advice do you have for other educators who are looking to take on a similar role as an innovation coach in their school, in their district,

Jessica Holloway:

Be willing to learn and be comfortable living outside your comfort zone. Mm-Hmm.

Monica Burns:

<Affirmative>.

Jessica Holloway:

And it's a very humbling experience as a coach to realize you, you're never gonna know all of the things about all of the things. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. However you can ask the right questions. You can connect with right tools and build your knowledge and expertise over time. But really if you're, if you embrace learning, if you're willing to be a thought partner and realize you're not the expert walking into the room and so mm-hmm. <Affirmative>, if you have the mindset of I'm here to co-create with you. I'm here to be your thought partner, collaborative problem solver. And there's gotta be a little level of risk taking of like, this may fail

Monica Burns:

Mm-Hmm <affirmative>.

Jessica Holloway:

But we're gonna fail and figure out how to do it better the next time. Because when you're innovating, you're gonna try things that aren't necessarily all figured out. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. And with that there's a little bit of risk taking and creating an environment where you say, all right, we're gonna walk through this and if it doesn't work the way we want it to, we'll reflect on it. We'll figure out how to make it work, what we can do better. And then also being able to collaborate and, and make connections with the community in which you work. And so I find a lot of times I like to give teachers experiences or connections to get them beyond their classroom. Mm-Hmm.

Monica Burns:
<Affirmative> because

Jessica Holloway:

It's remembering that we're creating the next generation of the workforce and leaders in this world. And so if our learning experiences for students are so far removed and disjointed from what they're gonna experience when they leave the classroom, we're not setting them up to be successful. So talking with local businesses, organizations, industries of what skills do you need? How might we design something that gives them a similar experience that they're gonna see when they walk out into the community? So I would say that was a long answer, but short answer. Mm-Hmm.

Jessica Holloway:

Be willing to take risks, be comfortable outside your comfort zone, be the lead learner and have a little fun along the way.

Monica Burns:

That's the perfect way I think, to describe what's necessary for someone who's walking into a role where things are evolving, things are changing, where people have questions that I'm sure Right. Not everyone will have the answer to. Right. Or questions that nobody has the answer to just yet. And you know, that kind of gets into this next piece I wanna ask you, you know, which is around the topic of AI and education. Something I'm sure you're being asked about in your role as an innovation coach. We've talked about it a bunch on the podcast this year, but, you know, how are you thinking about the role of, you know, AI and education and EdTech integration? Are there questions that you're getting from teachers and administrators

about AI in the classroom? Would love to hear, you know, what you're thinking around this topic.

Jessica Holloway:

Yes. It's coming up a lot. We, we just started this conversation in our team meetings and we've done some purposeful play in exploring Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>, some AI sites. Last spring I had the, the privilege of going through the AI explorations course from ISTE Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> with a group of teachers. I had teachers that represented K 5 6, 8, 9, 12. And then an instructional technology coach as well go through the course. 'cause I wanted all perspectives on what could AI in education look like. And to be honest, I was very overwhelmed and I thought I was gonna, was gonna like, have to make AI so the course like was not making AI so that that was a relief. But what I found is that a lot of conversations are a narrow conversation around AI with generative AI. So everybody wants to talk about ChatGPT, but there's not a whole lot of conversation about machine learning, neural networks, data data mining and other components to ai.

Jessica Holloway:

They're talk, it's like if we went back 10 years and when everybody started talking about computer science and they were only talking about coding instead of all the other components, I think the same thing is happening right now in ai. We're only talking about generative AI because ChatGPT is very popular right now. Yeah. So that's the entry point people have, but then there's also like a fear of is it gonna take over? Is it just gonna like outsmart us? And I think a lot of that is just it's always the fear of the unknown. Yeah. It's also a lack of understanding how it really works. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So I think if we can inform like educators, but also like students and families of how like AI is only going to be as accurate, I'm not that gonna try not to say smart mm-Hmm.

Jessica Holloway:

<Affirmative> as accurate as the data in which it is given. So I tell them if they don't it, even if you're using ChatGPT and you're generating things, it's only working off the set of data it has. Now, if that data's coming from the internet, how reliable do you find all the information on the internet? So what it's outputting is only as reliable as the data that is being input. So I think a lot of it is understanding what AI really is and understanding the complete umbrella of AI and not just this narrow one lane, but it has a lot of conversations about academic integrity with students, about them having them write their papers or doing the work for them. So

that's a big conversation. We have not landed on a on an answer, but it's definitely a conversation that is happening.

Jessica Holloway:

It's happening with just everybody I've taken. And so there's a knee jerk response of like, Nope, we're just shutting it all down. No, we're not gonna talk about, we're gonna pretend like it doesn't exist. We're gonna go back to writing essays on paper. However, it's not saying go back to not setting up students and families and educators about the real world in which you're living in. So we can pretend it doesn't exist. Or we can think about how can we leverage this as a learning tool, as a tool for efficiency, as a tool for good instead of just the kind of fear factor of we don't know what this is, so we're just gonna, we're gonna hide it away and hope that it doesn't bother us.

Monica Burns:

And I think that's a really important perspective to share with listeners who are tackling what is AI, what does it mean for us? I love how your conversations around this we're thoughtful and intentional enough to incorporate multiple roles, right. Where people are talking about their experiences and anticipating how this might connect with the work that they do. So, you know, Jessica, I really appreciate you sharing both your insights on what it means to be an innovation coach. Right. What it looks like day to day, how it's evolving. And of course, this AI connection that I know so many people are asking both of us <laugh> about. So I of course am gonna link out so that everyone can follow along with your work. But for someone who's on the go, maybe making that quick mental bookmark <laugh>, where can people connect with you? Where can they learn more about your work?

Jessica Holloway:

So I'm on X or Twitter. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> and Instagram @hollowayreader

Monica Burns:

Perfect. And I'll make sure everyone knows where to find you and stay connected. Thank you so much for your time today.

So let's make this EdTech easy with some key points from the episode…

Embrace risk taking.

Step out of your comfort zone.

Take on the role of lead learner.

Have fun along the way.

Remember, you can find the shownotes and the full list of resources from this episode

including all of the ways to connect with Jessica Holloway on classtechtips.com/podcast

and finding today's episode #242!

Promotion/Reminder

A big thank you to Ozobot, our sponsor for this episode. Ozobot creates award-winning programmable robots and STEAM-based learning solutions for K-12 education that empower the next generation of creators to discover new and exciting ways to learn. Starting this Friday, November 24th Ozobot is offering up to 50% on select products during their Black Friday sale - including one of my favorite learning tools, the Evo robot! Visit shop.ozobot.com this Friday, November 24th through Monday, November 27th to shop and save!

Outro

Thank you for tuning into another Tuesday episode of the Easy EdTech Podcast. If you are listening on Apple Podcasts or Spotify, or another favorite app, don't forget to hit the "Follow" button – this way next week's episode will be waiting for you first thing next Tuesday morning.

And if you want to share an idea from the episode with a friend or colleague, text, tweet or post the link on your favorite social media platform – and of course you can tag me @ClassTechTips with any questions!

Episode Resources

- Connect with Jessica Holloway on Twitter (X), Instagram, & LinkedIn
- ChatGPT (Open AI)
- ASCD: Professional Learning & Community for Educators
- Artificial Intelligence Explorations and Their Practical Use in Schools (ISTE Course)
- 14 Artificial Intelligence Teaching Tools (Blog Post)
- Answers to Your Project-Based Learning Questions with Erin Murphy and Ross Cooper (Podcast Episode)

- [How to Integrate Project-Based STEM Challenges into Your Teaching](#) (Blog Post)
- [Why Equity in STEM Education is Critical for the Future](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [Using Hāpara to Make Project Based Learning Easier](#) (Blog Post)