

Details

AI Strategies from an Instructional Supervisor with Amir Taron Ayres - 338

In this episode, I chat with curriculum supervisor and educator Amir Taron Ayres about effective AI strategies for lesson planning and instructional leadership. You'll also hear how educators are using artificial intelligence tools to unpack standards, design lessons, and support diverse learners. Tune in to explore practical, ethical, and mindset-shifting ways to integrate AI into your teaching practice!

Link to live show notes: <https://classtechtips.com/2025/09/23/ai-strategies-338/>

*AI Strategies

Introduction

Hello there, and welcome to today's episode of the Easy EdTech podcast. My name is Monica Burns, and I am so glad you're here to join me today. If you want to make the most of education technology, AKA EdTech, you are in the right place. My goal has always been to help make EdTech easier and give you ideas to try yourself, share with a colleague, or bookmark for later in the school year.

Every Tuesday on the Easy EdTech podcast, you'll hear stories from my time in the classroom, my work with schools and districts, and my travels to different EdTech events. Get ready for solo episodes where I share some quick tips, stories, and interviews full of practical ideas and stories from new guests each month. If we mention something you'd like to check out, make sure to click the link. You'll find it in the episode description or the summary area where you're listening to this podcast, or you can find every episode and all of the resources we mention by going to EasyEdTechPodcast.com or by going to classtechtips.com and just clicking on the Easy EdTech Podcast button at the top of the page.

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Today's Intro

This week's episode is titled: "AI Strategies from an Instructional Supervisor with Amir Taron Ayres - 338" a Curriculum Supervisor (ELA and Social Studies) also based in New Jersey . I came across an article that he wrote for Edutopia this spring and invited him on the podcast

to chat about the work happening in his district. He is tackling what AI means from an instructional lens and shares really actionable strategies alongside his perspective in today's episode. Let's jump into the conversation.

Episode Transcript

Monica Burns:

Welcome to the podcast. I am so excited to chat about AI and your role, right. As an instructional supervisor and all the connections there. But before we dive in, can you share with listeners a bit about your role and education? What does your day-to-day look like?

Amir Taron Ayres:

Awesome. Sure. And first of all, thank you so much for having me. Super excited to talk about AI and really anything involving education. My name is Amir Teran Ayers. I am a curriculum supervisor at a charter school in Camden, New Jersey. Leap Academy University Charter School. I supervise high school English language arts, as well as middle and high school social studies. My day-to-day kind of involves, you know, overseeing ELA social studies curriculum, the implementation of the curriculum lesson plan checks, classroom visits. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. You know, PLCs here we call 'em CPTs. It's common planning time. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. You know, education is full of all these wonderful acronyms. <Laugh>, <laugh> there's some coaching to what I do. I'm involved with PD planning, PD implementation. I also have the pleasure of doing recruitment for our district. I'm involved with the recruiting process, with hiring some retention components. And perhaps probably one of the most important aspects of my responsibilities on paper is really just to ensure that our students are proficient, you know, in the state standards that are measured through standardized assessments. So, that's probably everything in a nutshell.

Monica Burns:

Yeah. And, you know, given your perspective of working with lots of different educators, lots of different student groups, the ELA right component, as we jump into an AI conversation, you know, today we're talking about what's working and maybe not working with AI in schools. What have you seen in your learning environment related to AI use and adoption?

Amir Taron Ayres:

Yeah, so it's so interesting. We've, we've been able to sort of come in on the ground floor of this. So I remember when, you know, ChatGPT first hit mm-hmm <affirmative>. And we immediately, like immediately saw a change in student writing. But then what struck me, right, because my primary responsibility is to teachers, of course, I'm serving students and families. Mm-Hmm. But in my day to day, I'm working more with teachers in this role. And what became really interesting to me is that I started to see a change in staff writing, right? Yeah. I started to see a change in lesson plans, and then I started to see a change in teaching materials. And so, you know when we talk about kind of like what's working and I definitely think there are some great AI platforms specifically geared towards teaching mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Amir Taron Ayres:

You know, like Diffit, like Brisk things of that nature. And I also love the idea that teachers are, have more at their disposal to curate materials Yeah. Outside of textbooks, right? Definitely, I, I, I'm always a proponent of, you know, stepping away from a textbook as much as possible. So I, I feel like AI has given teachers the ability to do that as well. But then if we're talking about what I've seen in AI kind of fast forwarding to this past school year what I noticed you know, from 24, 25 is really just a marked increase Yeah. Of AI use. But, but among teachers and administrators, right? Students, students have been using ai and there are teachers who were using it. I think this last year I saw, you know, like an exponential increase of AI use.

Amir Taron Ayres:

So I really started to kind of dig into this idea of what it means to really refine like the effective use of ai, specifically as teachers and administrators, because, you know, while I'm seeing a lot more AI use from my lens, from my vantage point mm-hmm <affirmative>. It looks like I'm seeing this AI adoption for the purpose of mitigating workload, which, you know, I can stand behind that, but if that's the only reason why you're using AI in the field of education, nonetheless, you know, we're only scratching the surface. And so that has had a major impact on my work over the last year.

Monica Burns:

And I love that point that you made, that it's just, you know, a part of the conversation here, right? The productivity piece. And, you know, I feel when I work with educators and much of my work as well as more on the obstructional side, right? On what can teachers do behind the scenes, right? To prepare for these moments with students. You know, this idea of productivity and saving time is great. It's like a first step though. Yes. Into these more intentional use cases,

these things that are more purposeful for supplementing curriculum or textbooks like you mentioned. And in your a Utopia article. That's how I first learned about your work, even though we're both based in New Jersey, <laugh>, not, not terribly far away from one another, but you know, in your a dystopia article, you make a strong case for using AI as a thought partner. And I love that idea of the collaboration, right? That can happen here. So can you share an example where that framing made a real difference in your work or, or something that you observed?

Amir Taron Ayres:

Yeah, so the interesting thing about that framing is the biggest impact that it made on my work over the last year really involves the work that I do with teachers. And, and, and, and just planning, you know, high quality lessons or, or, or solid lessons. And again, as I said, I started to see a change in what lesson plans would look like. And then of course, there's always what a lesson plan looks like versus what the implementation mm-hmm <affirmative>. Of that lesson looks like. But a lot of the work that I do, I work with teachers in my content areas, in, in small groups, either based on grade level, the middle school level, or just based, you know on content at the high school level. And in having conversations, I could really just see that lesson plans were being generated for the purposes of having lesson plans, right?

Amir Taron Ayres:

Yeah. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And that's not a knock to any teachers in my district or anywhere else, because if you've taught long enough, you know, you've got a plan, but you know what you're teaching and they're not always the same thing, right? Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. You know. So I started to approach the work with the teachers specifically who were using ai the same way that I would approach the work prior to ai, but, but, but now kind of embracing it. So what I mean is you've generated a lesson plan, and the plan serves a great purpose. But, you know, have you gone back to the standard that you're teaching? Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. Have you taken that standard and unpacked it into some, you know, rigorous and measurable goals, right? And are you basing your assessment first? Right? Here's my goal, here's my assessment of that goal, and then how am I gonna teach it?

Amir Taron Ayres:

Right? So these are just the basics, right? Of teaching. This is when I first started teaching, you know, we sit in a room and unpack standards, right? And I think a lot of times that whole practice has gotten lost. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And so rather than, and I'll wrap this point up, but rather than, you know, going to ChatGPT or Gemini and saying, Hey, you know, gimme

a lesson on, you know, no taxation without representation, right? Let's actually go back to the standard, right? And if you haven't learned how to unpack the standards, let's see how AI unpacks the standard mm-hmm <affirmative>. Right? Let's see what goals AI's going give us generated from this standard. Great. Now we've got these goals. All right, now how are we gonna assess these goals? You can give me an answer on that, right? And I'd love to hear your answer on that, that, yeah, let's see what AI is gonna say about that. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. Let's compare the answers. Let's refine that. All right, great. Now how are we gonna teach this? Right? So, so the lesson plan that comes out of that process inevitably looks much different than, Hey, gimme a lesson plan on those taxation, right? Without representation. Right? And so that's where the, my biggest the, the biggest impact on my framing has been through my work with teachers. Yeah. You know, in that regard.

Monica Burns:

And just as you're, you know, talking there, I just, I really love your emphasis on the process because I think it's very easy to see one of these tools and to think about, you know, what is it that I can do to just jump from A to Z as opposed to have it as a tool maybe alongside, you know, two people sharing a screen and having a conversation in the same way you might sit across from one another and, you know, talk about something in a mentor mentee situation or a coaching situation, right? You now have this vehicle that can really drive right what you're trying to accomplish and be this third voice <laugh>, if you will. Right? Yeah. And, and the examples you gave about connecting to unpacking the standards on refining right. Your prompts so that you could ask the follow up questions When it comes to that prompt refinement, you know, and treating AI like a collaborator, you know, are there specific chat bots, specific tools, or just a great strategy that you found helps educators level up this prompting these prompting skills that they're building?

Amir Taron Ayres:

Sure. So if I can answer in two parts the first thing I would say is I like to meet educators where they are, right? Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. So different teachers use different tools. Most teachers I found over the past, and of course this is anecdotal, yeah. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. But the teachers that I've worked with, most of them, you know, know about ChatGPT. So using ChatGPT. So then, so then I just ask them, you know, have you ever tried Gemini? Oh, what's Gemini? I mean, you're not gonna see much of a difference between Gemini and chat GBT, but it's another tool so you can kind of like, play with, see the difference. And, you know a lot of teachers use in our district use Diffit, right? Yeah. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. So we really have to go heavy into Diffit, but have you tried Brisk, right?

Amir Taron Ayres:

So as far as the, the, the the prompting and engineering prompts and what platforms are using teachers are using, I'm usually trying to meet them where they are and then give them like a little bit extra on top of that, right? Yeah. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. So here you tried that, let's work on this together. This is what you're comfortable on. Hey, when you have some time, try this. Right? you know, here's something I did with this. You could take a look. And one thing I love about, you know, chat, GPT Gemini, a lot of these platforms, is that I can just send you a link to the entire, you know, yeah. Session that I just had. And I, and that's been a great training tool, but I think the bigger question about just prompt refinement for teachers mm-hmm <affirmative>. So that the, the article that you read about thought partnering with ai mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Amir Taron Ayres:

As I was working on that article, I was also building a professional development session mm-hmm <affirmative>. On the exact same topic, and ran had the privilege of running that professional development session. I had so much fun with that session. <Laugh> <laugh>. But the point what, what I wanted to bring it to is, the interesting thing is the prompt refinement piece was only one small part of that pd. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. I would say at least 50% of that professional development session really was about shifting mindset. Yeah. Right? And, and, and, and the whole idea of teachers embracing prompt refinement has everything to do with shifting from an understanding of AI as not just simply, and I know this sounds redundant 'cause we kind of touched on this Yeah. But not just simply as a time saving tool but as a tool that can enhance mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Amir Taron Ayres:

You know, your already effective craft or the things that you're already doing effectively, you can do it better if, if, if you embrace that mindset. So in addition to the time that, you know, we spent on all of the prompting stuff, that was kind of towards the end. But before that, we looked at like the percentage of our AI use just for reducing workload versus for strengthening our output. We looked at teacher perception of student AI use, and then mm-hmm <affirmative>. Teacher perce perception of like administrator AI use and feedback and communication. We looked at the gaps, right? Between how we view our own AI use mm-hmm <affirmative>. Versus what we expect from others. So essentially examining this question, you know, do you scrutinize your use of AI the same way you scrutinize student and administrator use of ai mm-hmm <affirmative>. And then just as important, we looked at this

whole idea of AI dependence and cognitive offloading, which can then lead to cognitive atrophy.

Amir Taron Ayres:

I read a really, really good piece on that during the school year. There's a blog a substack actually by a gentleman named I'm probably gonna say his name wrong, but Nick Koski. Okay. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And he has a substack called Educating ai, and he had a guest post from someone named Nigel p Daley. And that whole article was just about AI fluency managing cognitively and AI dependency. And so we kind of looked at some of those ideas and eventually, you know, once we did all this mindset work, it got everyone to a place where they were super receptive to this idea of taking an iterative approach to using AI as a thought partner. You know,

Monica Burns:

And I really like just, you know, both of those pieces that you, you shared around the mindset shift and understanding, right? What goes into Right. A session that you might have with a chat bot where you're interacting, you're following up with a question, you're writing a prompt and making those, you know, changes and refinements. And one thing you said that I think would be a really great tip for someone who is trying to accomplish those same goals is sharing the chat itself. You know, a lot of these tools, whether it's ChatGPT or Gemini, you can link out to what might feel like a transcript, right? Of, I said this, the chat bot responded, this was my input, this is the next response. And it's a great way to show someone Sure. What's possible, right? So that might you know, address the mindset shift, but then also how you accomplished it, right.

Monica Burns:

The practical piece of it. So I just wanted to point that out for people in case they missed it because you mentioning that is such, is such a great strategy for someone who is trying this out, pull has some good examples on their screen and wants others to, you know, explore a bit or maybe, you know, break it down. Like we would do a close reading of a text <laugh> Yeah. By having that, you know, that piece. And you know, as you're having conversations, I know I experienced this in the professional development that I do, you know, there are plenty of valid valid things that come up, you know, where people are hesitant to try this out or have some reservations around this technology. A lot of my conversations recently, it's been really interesting to hear some great questions around environmental impact, right? And just all these different things that we can talk about, you know, around this type of technology. So

I'm curious, you know, what challenges, or maybe even, you know, misconceptions do you hear from educators about AI in the classroom, you know, as part of their instructional practice?

Amir Taron Ayres:

Oh, sure. Absolutely. you know, I think probably the biggest misconception that I hear, you know, is that AI doesn't belong in the classroom. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. You know, I think that we are doing our students a disservice by not, you know, kind of attacking this AI fluency piece because the reality is students are using ai, whether <laugh>, whether they're using it with your express permission or not, they're using ai. And so I think that's a big misconception. One of the misconceptions that I see far too frequently is an over-reliance on AI as like an arbiter of truth, right? Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. AI makes mistakes. Yeah. And I mean, and, and, and if you, you use it long enough, you're gonna, you, if you use it long enough, taking that iterative approach, you're gonna find the mistakes, right? Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And it's gonna, it's gonna change the way you prompt, it's gonna change your workflow because then you kind of start to understand and identify patterns and ways to mitigate those mistakes.

Amir Taron Ayres:

You know, AI is, is not perfect. I think that's a big challenge. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. The other two challenges I would say is that double standard, you know if, if, if, if you're, if you have a mindset that I wanna use ai to reduce my workload, right? And it stops there, well, why do you think a student is using AI <laugh> Yeah. To reduce their workload, right? Why would an administrator take your observation, throw it in ChatGPT to give you feedback instead of write it themselves to reduce their workload? And I'm not saying I would do that, and I'm not saying it's okay for a student to, to you know, use AI to write an essay that they're supposed to be writing themselves. What I'm saying is that's a hypocrisy, right? Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. That's a contradiction. So I think that that, that kind of gap there is something that I, that I see.

Amir Taron Ayres:

And then the last thing I would say is definitely ethics, right? Like ethics is the biggest challenge. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. What are the ethics? And I'm so glad that you mentioned kind of the environmental toll. I I work with some educators who are just absolutely opposed to AI because of the toll Yeah. That it takes on our environment. And and I don't have an answer for that, you know? Right. because I'm an educator, and what I understand intimately

is that whether I want to use AI or not, the teachers that I'm working with are going to use it. The administrators are gonna use it, but the students are gonna use it. Right? So how do we, how do we kind of reconcile <laugh> Yeah. All of these moving pieces in a responsible and ethical way. You know, I don't have the answer to that.

Monica Burns:

And I think that's a continuing conversation for so many folks who are, you know, starting a new school year in the midst of, you know, the school year, finishing out the school year, you know, or any point, right? Throughout the calendar year, you know, there's these moments of, of deep conversation that they might have with their colleagues around the, the moments they choose to use certain technology, the best use cases. And of course, you know, as you alluded to just some of the transparency, right? To avoid the hypocrisy of, I'm using this and, and you can't, or Right, this was my choice in this moment, but you shouldn't make that choice in that moment, right? That you might have in different members with different members of the school communities. So, you know, as we are, are finishing up together today, and, you know, if there's a school leader, a teacher, an instructional supervisor who's still hesitant about AI use or is excited and just isn't quite sure where to start, you know, what's one low stakes way you'd recommend they start exploring this technology?

Amir Taron Ayres:

Technology? Yeah. I, I would say super low stakes is look at one of the AI platforms that are made for education, right? Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. It's right up your alley. If you're not involved with math, right? If you're one of the <laugh>, one of the content areas that is highly dependent on words a little bit more than math is, although math is dependent on words mm-hmm <affirmative>. I would say look at something like, like Diffit, right? And I think some, some buy-in for educators who are kind of on the fence about AI with a program like Diffit is that, you know multi-language learners, English language learners, right? Fastest growing student population mm-hmm <affirmative>. In the country right now. Every school who has students who are learning the English language needs tools to be able to educate these students effectively. That's one of the things that Diffit does very easily, right?

Amir Taron Ayres:

Yeah. You can differentiate according to lexile level, reading level, grade level and by language, right? So I, I would say play around with Diffit come up with some assignments whether you're a teacher or administrator. Another, another buy-in piece for administrators who's never used ai is, you know right now with the teacher shortage, inevitably you're gonna

have substitutes in your building mm-hmm <affirmative>. If it is a great tool to ensure that you're aligning that substitute work while you're trying to hire, you know, your seventh grade math teacher or wherever your foster Yeah. Your science teacher, science teachers are the ones that are hardest to find. But, you know, I think just play around with a tool like, like that and you, you just be careful not to get addicted. <Laugh>,

Monica Burns:

I love that recommendation because it gets someone focused on an AI powered educational tool, right? So there's a, a way to really get them pointed right in that, that K 12 area and that actionable tip to say like, maybe it's a supplemental resource for this particular situation. Like you're being called into a meeting on a Tuesday period, seven <laugh>, right? Right. And this is something that kids can work on independently and then you can come back together and have a discussion about it. So, you know, I think that's a, such a, such a powerful example because we've all been in that situation if we've been in the classroom before and can see, you know, how that would, how that would be a useful right. Use case. So, you know, I really appreciate you taking the time to unpack these strategies and to share some great recommendations and resources with listeners. I'm going to put links out, so anyone listening right now can click and find you and follow along. But for anyone who's kind of on the go right now and and making that mental bookmark, where can listeners connect with you? Where can they learn more about your work?

Amir Taron Ayres:

Sure. so if you would like to connect on social media, I'm on Bluesky, Amir Taron, that's A-M-I-R-T-A-R-O-N dot BSKY dot S-O-C-I-A-L. I am still on x much to many people, chagrin. I really don't use it much, but <laugh>. Yeah. But, you know, I get a lot of interaction there. So you can find me on X if you're still on there at Amir Terron, and that's A-M-I-R-T-A-R-O-N-E-D. All of my education, or my Edutopia articles are on my profile mm-hmm <affirmative>. On Edutopia, and that's just my name, Amir Tarran Ayers, A-M-I-R-T-A-R-O-N-A-Y-R-E-S, not A-Y-E-R-S, <laugh>, everyone, misspells my last name. But it's A-Y-R-E-S. So those are the, the main areas where you can find me. I am also involved with a, a really great group of educators called the Empowerment Perspective Group. And if you are looking to, you know to find some really high quality pd mm-hmm <affirmative>. Or just link up with some like-minded educators who are also creatives and, you know, moving in a number of different spheres you can find us online at the empowermentperspective.com. So I think that's pretty much everything. Yeah.

Monica Burns:

That's perfect. Well, thank you again for your time today. Lots of great resources for listeners.

Amir Taron Ayres:

Awesome.

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

Productivity is a starting point, but true value comes from using AI as a thought partner.
A shift in mindset is essential for moving from surface-level to intentional AI use.
Sharing AI chat links is a practical strategy for collaboration and professional development.
Starting with AI-powered education tools is a low-stakes, high-value entry point.

Remember, you can find the shownotes and the full list of resources from this episode including all of the ways to connect with Amir Taron Ayres on EasyEdTechPodcast.com and finding today's episode #338!

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Episode Resources

- Connect with Amir Taron Ayres [X \(Twitter\)](#) & [Bluesky](#)
- Check out [Amir Taron Ayres' Edutopia profile](#)
- [Diffit](#) (AI curated teaching resources)
- [Brisk Teaching](#) (AI-powered teacher tools)
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