Most well intentioned teachers want to engage their students with technology rich lessons. However, many teachers do not know how to integrate technology in the classroom. A discussion of the traits and skills needed by a technology coach are presented to make the case for using coaches in the classroom.

The increasing demands on the teaching profession makes the job much more difficult. The pressures of high-stakes testing, accountability, classroom management, and the ever expanding curriculum leaves very little time for teachers to explore, much less master, technology.

Moreover, some teachers are intimidated by the disruptive change of using technology in the classroom, preferring the stable ground of traditional instruction. Nonetheless, most stakeholders agree it is vital to transform traditional instruction by integrating technology into the classroom. Teachers that do not integrate technology into their instruction are doing students a disservice.

Given the current condition, how do administrators and faculty members bridge the integration gap? One solution is modelling best practices from a peer teacher, which is an effective method of teaching adults.

Mentoring is a powerful way to develop teachers’ tech skills and pedagogy. Many times, the instruc-
tional lead teacher is a senior person without technology skills.

The technology coach, sometimes called a technology integration specialist, is a learning support professional who has a broad range of technical and personal skills to assist the general education teacher.

Similar to the co-teaching model used in special education, the technology coach works side-by-side with the teacher. The teacher is the content expert and drives the essential questions of the instructional process.

The coach assists with the technology acquisition or logistical issues. The coach is a colleague or near-peer, and more importantly, not an administrator that evaluates their performance.

Teachers are often intimidated by top down evaluations or outside consultants. The collegial relationship is very helpful in making the technology coaching model work.

Mary Hertz, a technology coach from Philadelphia, USA concludes that: “Coaching becomes a more effective model for today’s educator because it builds a distinct level of mutual respect and trust with the individual being coached, translating into a more effective learning environment.”

The model allows flexibility to adjust instruction for the particular setting, student diversity, or learning situation.

The tech coach, like most professionals, has multiple responsibilities in multiple domains. For example, the tech coach needs vision to see the changes in technology, tools, and techniques used to empower learning.

Detecting trends around the corner is a difficult task; however, it is not difficult to be proactive and start a foundation of technology usage.

Visionary leadership is one of the coaching standards suggested by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE).

Howard Gardner, in his theory of multiple intelligence, suggests that people with high interpersonal intelligence understand the feelings of others and possess strong communication skills. In addition to vision, the technology coach must have strong interpersonal skills.

The interpersonal intelligence is fundamental in establishing credibility in the co-teaching arrangement. Naturally, interpersonal intelligence is a fundamental personality trait of a potential technology coach.

The technology coach must also understand teaching. The world of education operates with a distinct vocabulary and culture. It is vital to understand pedagogy, assessment, and instructional design to know where to plug-in the technology.

To bridge this world, the ideal technology coach is a former classroom teacher. It is central to remember that instruction, teaching, and learning are paramount, while technology is the support tool.

In other words, the curriculum drives the instruction, not the technology. Finally, the tech coach has vision, interpersonal skills, and understands the teaching and learning process.

The professional development (PD) model is a tried and true method of delivering instructional content. In addition to co-teaching in the classroom, the technology coach is responsible for conducting professional development workshops for guiding practice.

A report from the National Staff Development Council in 2009 revealed: “Collaborative approaches to professional learning can promote school change that extends beyond just individual classrooms”.

If the power and potential of professional development is to be realised, the tech coach must employ effective PD strategies.

Most PD is delivered on the school’s schedule. However, the end user needs PD when they have a problem. This may be at home or off hours.

Can distance learning techniques that are used with the K-12 students be leveraged to deliver PD to teachers on their schedules? This facilitates just-in-time instructional models that are effective with adult learners. Hopefully, this will plant the seeds of change described by the National Staff Development Council.

It may be difficult to find talented people with the wide skill set required to serve as a tech coach. Perhaps it is more efficient to invest in the development of the coach instead of trying to hire a unique skill set. This is a novel and sometimes difficult problem in schools with high turnover rates.

It may be more practical for an administrator to identify an existing faculty member with good technology skills, and the disposition of working with other teachers. It is easier to enhance the skills of someone who already has aptitude, than build that skill set from scratch.

The ideal technology coach is a former classroom teacher. This person may need intense technical familiarity and may have to travel to build their own knowledge base.

Finally, a lack of time for planning and exploring new ideas is a common theme heard in school buildings. The principal can work with the schedule to facilitate shared planning time and professional development opportunities. Hopefully, your school may consider implementing a technology coach in one or two grade levels.
Breaking the mould

Oxford International AQA Examinations’ Kate Harris and Andrew Hall tell Education Journal Middle East why there is a need for dedicated GCSE and A-Levels qualifications for British curriculum schools in the Middle East.