

Questions from registrants of EdTech Insights: A Fireside Chat with Industry Veterans:

Transitioning from Teaching to EdTech Careers

1. What skills and experiences should I highlight on my resume when applying to EdTech positions? What skills and qualities are valued in EdTech candidates?

When applying to edtech positions, it's necessary to show familiarity with edtech products. You don't need to know every edtech product, but some understanding and general knowledge of the product landscape is important. On your resume, highlight strong oral and written communication skills. Edtech companies value efficiency and the ability to cooperate in fast-paced environments, so these should be emphasized on your resume and in interviews. If you have district relationships that could bring a company some pilot partners or customers, that is a plus.

2. What's the best way to make connections and network in the EdTech industry?

Attend events, whether they're virtual or in person, and follow up with people you meet there. Make connections on LinkedIn, message them, and try to set up a time to talk. Networking is challenging and requires a lot of effort, but it's often worth it. Aim for a few hours of networking each week. It might not guarantee a job, but it certainly increases your chances.

3. Do you have general advice for transitioning from teaching to EdTech careers?

Before applying to roles, take time to think about the role you want and the type of edtech company you want to work for. Edtech companies come in many different stages, and different stages of companies have different needs. In early-stage companies, there's a need for generalists who can juggle various tasks. Your days might be filled with diverse tasks, and even if you're assigned to one department, you often get the opportunity to work on multiple projects and explore new areas. Conversely, roles at later-stage companies are usually much more specialized; your daily responsibilities will be tightly focused around a particular kind of task. Early stage companies are also much riskier, but offer much more reward if you're part of that early team that turned nothing into something. Also, in general, you should probably expect harder work, longer days, and more sleepless nights at early stage companies. Take some time to reflect on the type of work environment you prefer and what your ideal day would look like. Being objective with yourself about your strengths, weaknesses, and needs will help you market yourself effectively.

Try to set up as many "informational interviews," as you can. But understand that the nice person who's meeting with you to give you free advice is quickly going to ask, "What kind of role are you looking for?" It's not a great look to say, "I have experience in product, marketing, and business development." That means you don't really have a lot of experience in any of them.

Similarly, claiming you're interested in lots of different kinds of roles means you just haven't researched them enough to form an opinion, and makes you sound like a total newbie.

AI

1. What will be the impact of AI on the EdTech space?

Right now, there's a lot of noise in the AI space. It's going to take time to sort out what's important and what's not. Patterns are still forming. We're working on some pretty cool AI stuff, and there's definitely a powerful use case for it, but it's a wait-and-see situation.

2. How can we use AI for personalized learning and improving student outcomes?

The short answer is that AI enables highly personalized content, from individual assignments to year-long curricula. It can also give teachers the flexibility to divide classes into pods and customize learning for the pods. There's a lot of potential, but which approaches succeed will depend on what the market embraces.

The long answer is quite detailed. Starting in 2007, I built a company Knewton, which is a very successful adaptive learning product (now owned by Wiley) that is based heavily on machine learning (a common type of AI). Most adaptive learning products, under the hood, are actually just very simple algorithms based on somewhat arbitrary If-Then statements: e.g., *if the student gets 80% or more correct on this quiz they can move on; otherwise they have to keep doing problems on this topic*. These kinds of adaptive learning products essentially trick users into thinking they're much more personalized than they really are. In fact, they're just crude decision trees. Knewton created a much more powerful adaptive learning engine that can algorithmically "calibrate" all learning content; that is, measure the percentile difficulty level of assessment items and calculate how effective instructional content is at teaching a particular topic to a given learner. In contrast to simple decision trees, Knewton is a constantly updating proficiency measurement and response engine that dynamically generates each student's content in real-time based on the combined data of (what worked best for) all other students. Building something like this back in 2008 was difficult and very expensive. New developments in AI should make it cheaper to build these kinds of very powerful personalized learning systems.

3. Are there ethical considerations in using AI and generative AI in the education space?

The ethical consideration that I'm most focused on is how we can use AI to deliver high-quality learning experiences to kids worldwide, regardless of their location or socioeconomic status. This is particularly crucial in low-income neighborhoods and the developing world, environments in dire need of more/better/cheaper rich-learning materials. With AI tools, the possibility of providing high-quality education to even the poorest kids globally suddenly feels attainable.

We're really excited about a solution we're working on ourselves: the AllCourse Content Generator (<https://home.allcourse.com/textbook>). This tool will let anyone create 1000s of worksheets at a time, or even create an entire custom textbook in just a few minutes. You'll be able to generate them with review questions and answers, images, and in any language you want. We think the AllCourse Content Generator is going to give kids worldwide access to personalized, high-quality educational materials.

The future of EdTech:

1. What are the trends in educational technology? What are the impacts on teaching and learning?

Education is a \$8 trillion global industry with so many trends that it's tough to pick just a few. In the higher ed space, there has been a lot of talk in the last decade about affordability and high textbook prices (we think tools like the [AllCourse Content Generator](#) will solve the latter). International students going abroad for college has been another big trend – one that [Kaplan](#) has been very involved in. In k-12, there's *a lot* of talk about the teacher shortage crisis (which we're also addressing at [AllCourse](#)), and how it continues to get worse and worse. Recently, AI has become a hot topic, but it's still so early, people don't yet know where it's headed.

How can EdTech advance equity in the classroom?

We're passionate about this at [AllCourse](#). Our primary focus is advancing equity in education by providing students access to a wide range of courses they might not currently have access to. We think students should be able to pursue any subject they're interested in or have an aptitude for, regardless of where they live or what their school offers. Whether it's advanced calculus, a comprehensive selection of AP courses, in-depth computer science, various foreign languages, or any other subject that's pedagogically valuable, our mission is to make these accessible to students across the world. The skills of the future are changing rapidly, and we want to help equip students with those skills.