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# Introduction

“The mind is just like a muscle—the more you exercise it, the stronger it gets and the more it can expand.”

—Idowu Koyenikan, *Wealth for All: Living a Life of Success at the Edge of Your Ability*

You are someone who embraces challenge, desires innovation, and looks for ways to expand your personal capacity. We understand your drive to improve and stretch yourself; that is why we wrote this book. This book will help you to develop as a conscious, learning-centered, reflective, and collaborative educator. While we incorporate educational technology as a critical component of the classroom learning experience, the focus is on pedagogical best practices and on doing what is right for your students and for your professional growth too. We know you are up for the challenge, and we hope this book will support you on your stretching journey.

We designed this book to be an active and personalized learning journey to help you innovate in your classroom. You will explore your educational values and beliefs, engage in activities that will extend your capacities, and analyze your own learning processes. Not only will the book include text for you to read and reflect upon, but it will also include activities, exercises, recommended resources, and tools to use along the way.

Through reading this book and adding your own reflections, you will learn or continue learning how to use educational technology in meaningful ways, deepening your teaching practice. We will dive into the importance and purpose of edtech as well as discuss how to keep a pedagogical focus as you read and implement ideas. Rather than a focus on technology tools, the

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learning goals and pedagogy should be a priority, along with your educational values and beliefs, such as your school's vision and mission. You will learn to make the tools less and less visible as the technology becomes integrated and effective throughout your classroom and teaching practices.

## Introducing Edtech Yoga

Why yoga? We chose yoga as the framework for this journey because it is something that we practice in our personal lives. Yoga provides a holistic way of advancing your learning practice, as it encompasses both the physical and the mental aspects of life. You may be a practicing yogi or you may not have any experience with yoga before reading this book, or perhaps you are somewhere in between. Regardless of your personal experience with yoga, you will be able to find meaning and value here. We felt that many of the yoga principles and concepts were easily relatable to all readers. Also, we practice yoga in our own lives to maintain physical well-being, to center ourselves, to stay calm, and to be present!

Yoga comes in many forms but all incorporate the ideas of breath, poses and movements, and meditation. The breath is a vital force that grounds you and brings you to the present moment. Breath is necessary for life, and as such, it is an essential element of yoga. Breath connects us with our activities, our environment, and our senses—some of the key goals of the physical practice of yoga as well. A physical yoga practice involves learning and trying to execute various poses that emphasize different physical strengths or parts of the body. And the physical practice is never complete; there is no finish line. Rather, each pose acts as a personal journey toward improvement. Some days, you might be able to pop up into a headstand without any difficulty, and some days, your legs might not make it off the ground. The goal is to continue working on yourself by focusing on the practice and on the connection with the breath. To further this, yoga uses meditation as a tool to focus the mind. Meditation involves observing your thoughts and being aware of the conscious and unconscious mind. It might involve a centering mantra, or it might just be observational. Either way, the goal of meditation is not to quiet the mind but to be present, open, and aware.

We've taken some of the concepts of yoga and turned them into edtech yoga. With the breath, we want to focus on elevating your consciousness and taking a good look at your current edtech teaching and learning practice. Taking a breath in edtech yoga allows you to assess where you are now so that you can better determine your goals for the future. With the physical practice of edtech yoga, we focus on the stretching aspects of the physical practice of yoga, which is needed in many of the poses. Stretching in edtech yoga is action oriented, teaching you what tools, or props, you might need to help you stretch and then guiding you in the development of an action plan for implementation. Finally, the meditative piece of edtech yoga is about the collaborative and reflective processes that help us grow as educators. Meditation in edtech yoga centers you as a connected and empowered edtech educator. As you concentrate on your purpose, your goal will slowly become visible; and you will start becoming self-reflective, self-compassionate, and more flexible.

## How Our Process Can Help You

In *Stretch Yourself*, you get to be both reader and writer! This book is not just written for you to passively read and consume; though you will have the traditional opportunity to read, you will also have the chance to contribute and personalize the content so that it's meaningful to your context. Do you remember reading interactive fiction books, such as the Choose Your Own Adventure series, in which the story unfolds based on your choices? Well, in a similar manner, our intent is to provide a book that you can personalize—one that is learner centered, self-paced, and will lead you to discover yourself and become your own hero! And the personalized learning in this book provides a process as well as activities that you can transfer to the classroom, with your students, wherever you teach around the world.

Our goal in writing *Stretch Yourself* was to deliver a message of empowerment to the reader. We did not say anything new in this book; rather, we tried to collate ideas that inspired us and that might also spark your curiosity and support your growth. We want to share our perspective on how to stretch yourself as an edtech educator just like we have—and continue to

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do—ourselves. The book is designed to be an active and unique experience for each individual reader.

As connected learners, we also wanted to integrate other educators' voices, so we asked individuals from our networks to share their own stretching stories and realizations. To honor their contributions and embed a diversity of voices, you will find their sayings throughout the book.

Most of the concepts discussed revolve around innovation and learning, with technology in the background. As we wrote the book, we learned, unlearned, and relearned what we thought we knew about education and educational technology. In writing, we experienced the same stretching journey that we hope you will experience as a reader.

Every one of you has the power to make a positive difference in the world of education, so whatever gems you find in yourself by reading and contributing your ideas in this book, share away by connecting with us on this website: [noborderslearning.com/stretch-yourself](http://noborderslearning.com/stretch-yourself)

Your voice matters, and sharing will multiply your impact as you inspire others. We want you to take an active part in an interconnected world of changemakers.

## Book Organization

This book is divided into three parts—"Breathe," "Stretch," and "Meditate"—and each part connects to specific ISTE Standards for Educators:

**Part 1, "Breathe,"** is all about pausing, taking a step back, and elevating your consciousness about your potential as an innovative educator, igniting or reigniting your passion for education. It takes you through steps to live and adopt a growth mindset. It asks you to examine your dreams, aspirations, values, and beliefs; and it strives to acknowledge the hardship every educator might face, reminding you that you are not alone! This section is meant to be hopeful and action centric, providing practical and encouraging ways to put your vision into action or to reassess your actions, keeping

your spirits up in the process. We want to move you from feeling isolated in your classroom to finding the courage to become a connected educator who cocreates diamond-shaped networks.

At the end of this part of the book, you should be aware of something that might have been dormant in you—something precious and exciting. While this will be rejuvenating and motivating, you may find yourself with more questions than answers! But rest assured: as you concentrate on your purpose, your goal *will* become visible and you *will* become self-reflective, self-compassionate, and increasingly flexible. You will also declutter your teaching and take meaningful action to empower yourself, gaining the confidence to be your emerging self!

**Part 2, “Stretch,”** starts by introducing technology *inside* a box in order to think about what might exist *outside* the box. That way, we can apply our creativity and critical thinking when designing learning engagements.

When we think technology, we often think about tools, sites, the internet, and tech gadgets and gizmos. However, *Stretch Yourself* would like to bring in less tech and more learning. This part of the book tackles the importance of curating as well as sharing ideas. It also brings you back to your situation, your field, and how you might need to put your vision into action, regardless of the challenges that you face and how you will inspire others when you share your experience. It deals with adopting an interactive mindset, designing safe and responsible technology use, and facilitating authentic student agency. It also helps you to keep your balance and cautions you to resist the urge to overstretch.

**Part 3, “Meditate,”** is all about reflecting and collaborating. It is meant to trigger introspection and deep thinking, and also support you when giving or receiving meaningful feedback. This section focuses on giving feedback in a coaching situation that actually helps individuals grow.

Reflectivity is an essential quality for educators because we live in a world that is ever changing—a point made more evident in the digital age. This part of the book reviews the tenets of true collaboration and encourages you to share your journey with others beyond the limits of your school,



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extending your learning while strengthening your identity as an empowered educator.

You will also notice the use of some tentative language throughout the book (the use of “might” dominates the use of “could” or “should,” for example). This is intentional, as we thrive to embrace a design thinking approach. We want to let you be in charge and think deeply about yourself rather than disrupt your thinking by providing directives.

## How to Use This Book

Each chapter in the book will take you through a personalized learning process, with “Stretching Exercises”; supportive resources and tools (“Edtech Props,” similar to yoga props, such as slings, straps, and blocks); self-reflection “Meditation Prompts”; and practical “Take a Breath” ideas to encourage input in your learning experience. This introduction as well as the chapters end with “Inspiration” sections featuring our book recommendations for further exploration.

It’s not necessary to work linearly through the book. You may want to skip exercises and come back to them later. Or you may want to do the exercises now and then come back to do them again next year, to refresh your practice. No matter what, always start with the flexibility quiz (found later in this section) to assess your current practice and inclination to a certain profile or profiles. Each detailed profile description (appendix A) gives suggested chapters to focus your studies. From there, you can work through the other chapters and exercises as you are ready. Just don’t try to do it all at once. Instead, refer back to certain components as they relate to the challenges you encounter in your everyday teaching practices.

The creative exercises and journaling spaces represent what Daniel Pink (2018) calls *midpoints*: times that can either generate sparks or slumps. To make the sparks fly, follow Pink’s advice:

- ◆ Acknowledge midpoints; don’t ignore them. The creative spaces in this book are here to help you pause and think about where

you are. Avoid skipping them, as they provide opportunities for deep reflection, contributing immensely to your growth. Be principled and engage in those exercises to get the most out of this book.

- ◆ Use those midpoints to put your full attention on your new learning. Even if they aren't pleasant discoveries and they make you anxious, resist the urge to stress out and exert control over yourself. Welcome these moments and immerse yourself mindfully into them. As you do this, you will feel a sense of achievement and satisfaction that naturally dissolves your trepidation.
- ◆ Imagine that you are a little bit late. It's useful to feel (or pretend to feel) just a bit behind, as this motivates you to take action and accelerates your thinking process by honing in on the most important points. It's like tricking your brain into focusing.

We invite you to use the creative and interactive components in this book to make it your own. Through reading, you might find comfort and reassurance; and through journaling, you might find revelation and audacity. As an empowered learner, the opportunities to record your thinking and observations through a step-by-step process will help you design *your* growth and own it. In order to kick off this personalized journey to deepen your teaching practice, we have designed the following flexibility quiz to get you going in a fun and engaging way.

We want your reading of the book to be a journey of being present with yourself but also the impetus pushing you forward, stretching you as an educator and making a difference in your classroom. Being present is a simple concept but one that can be difficult to obtain. Being present means being aware of what is happening *here* and *now*. It means not worrying about what happened in the past or about what is to come; all that matters is the current task at hand. The concept of presence is similar to being attentive but does not carry the meaning of "paying attention," because you are completely and naturally focused, with no need to force yourself to concentrate.