

Tool: Cognitive Coaching Basics

Timing: For “practice” evaluation cycles. Novice teacher plans and teaches the lesson. Mentor guides Novice through Planning and Reflecting Conferences.

Purpose: To promote reflective, thoughtful analysis of teaching

Coaching is a way--

To improve student learning and classroom instruction

[focusing on student needs, curriculum objectives, instructional strategies, assessment technique]

To promote novice teacher’s cognitive development

[guiding teachers’ goal setting, self-assessment and self-monitoring, reflective practice]

To strengthen professionalism throughout the school

[energizing teachers by increasing opportunities to engage in productive conversations about their work]

To enhance feelings of efficacy and instilling a “can do” attitude

[strengthening collaborative and cooperative relationships, promoting flexibility and creative problem solving in identifying possible solutions to instructional challenges, and encouraging ownership]

To assure novice teacher’s understanding of expectations of the profession

[providing in-depth training such as study groups, interactive instruction, and modeling with professional standards so that novices fully understand the research-based expectations for teaching (e.g., learning principles, brain research)].

To prepare the novice for the evaluation process

[orienting teacher to the entire evaluation process including the forms, timeframes, performance standards, and rubrics]

The Language of Coaching--

- Accepting*
- Acknowledging*
- Questioning*
- Paraphrasing*
- Clarifying*
- Probing*

Coaching Basics

- ❖ Maintain positive assumptions about the teacher’s competence and good intentions.
- ❖ Establish and maintain a trusting relationship through consistent, supportive interactions and objective, meaningful feedback about improvement.
- ❖ Build the teacher’s sense of efficacy by building on his/her strengths and effective behaviors or actions exhibited during observations, professional interactions, meetings with others, etc.
- ❖ Engage in active listening by showing supportive nonverbal behaviors and empathetic, nonjudgmental understanding.
- ❖ Use questions skillfully to promote teacher thinking, problem solving and decision making.
- ❖ Use questioning to engage, mediate, and thereby enhance the cognitive functions of teaching. Phrase questions in appropriate ways to focus the teacher’s attention and awareness and to elicit significant information about his/her instructional thinking. Their intent is to strengthen the intellectual functions of teaching.
- ❖ Acknowledge the teacher’s responses with neutral acceptance rather than with evaluative comments.

- ❖ Use probing questions and paraphrasing statements to help clarify any vague or unclear points or possible misunderstandings; to elicit more details or information from the teacher's perspective; to discover the teacher's reasoning, connections, or the context of specific statements; or to help refocus thinking.

Purpose of the PLANNING Conference (Planning Record)

- ❖ to give the novice a mental rehearsal of the upcoming lesson
- ❖ to clarify his/her thinking about all aspects of the lesson
- ❖ to assist the novice in understanding key aspects of instructional planning
(*The intent is not to plan the lesson for the novice. The lesson must be owned by the teacher.*)

Guidelines:

- ❖ Allow the novice to complete the Planning Record independently prior to the discussion.
- ❖ Listen to the novice's responses as if you have no knowledge of the students, curriculum expectations, activities, etc. The idea is that you do not want to *assume* too much.
- ❖ Have a face-to-face conference focused on the lesson (avoid getting into extraneous issues). This will require 10 to 20 minutes depending on the clarity of the teacher's thinking.
- ❖ Have the conference in the instructional setting if at all possible. This makes it easier to understand the logistics of the lesson—people, materials, and equipment.
- ❖ Hold the conference within 24 hours of teaching the lesson. Planning for the lesson should be based on current student needs and place in the curricular sequence.
- ❖ Be sure to let the teacher know that is okay to change the plan if necessary. During lessons, certain situations arise (e.g., unanticipated misunderstandings, technology problems) and teacher should not feel bound to the planning if it is not working.

Purpose of the REFLECTING Conference (Reflecting Record)

- ❖ To give the novice the opportunity to examine objective observational data, to recall and describe what took place during the lesson, and to synthesize the data into patterns that contributed to or distracted from students' achieving the learning objectives
- ❖ To guide the novice in forming cause and effect connections between teaching behaviors and actions with student achievement and to identify refinements or changes that could be anticipated to have a positive impact on student learning
- ❖ To become familiar with critical, research-based teaching standards.
- ❖ To discover new learning and insights about effective teaching and learning
(*The intent is not for the Mentor to make all recommendations, but to guide the novice in effective problem-solving.*)

Guidelines:

- ❖ The mentor should allow the novice to complete the Reflecting Record independently prior to discussing the observation.
- ❖ Hold a face-to-face conference (30 to 50 minutes) which allows sufficient time for analysis.
- ❖ Restrain from using evaluative comments until a thorough analysis of the lesson has taken place.
- ❖ Conference in the instructional setting if at all possible—and within 24 hours of the lesson.
- ❖ Engage the novice actively in the analysis and problem solving. Be sure that all recommendations

are research-based and linked to the teaching standards.

- ❖ Limit the number of recommendations to priority areas. The novice needs to know what significant actions need to be taken to improve the situation. A beginning teacher cannot focus on everything at once and needs guidance in knowing what to attend to first.
- ❖ Make sure the novice thoroughly understands any recommendations and knows how to use them. As the coach, it is important to hear it in the teacher's own words.

Planning Conference Mediation Questions

These questions are only examples--not meant to be prescriptive nor complete. Skilled coaches ask questions such as the following, the mentor/coach is helping the novice to:

Identify the learning outcomes for the lesson. (Describe)

- ❖ What is your lesson going to be about today?*
- ❖ Tell me about the learning objectives you've identified for the students. Specifically, what is it that you hope the students will know and be able to do as a result of this lesson?
- ❖ Will all the students be working toward the same objectives? If not, what objectives will several of these students be working on?
- ❖ What is the overall unit of study for this lesson? At what point are you in this unit of instruction (beginning middle, end)? About how long will this unit take?

Identify important student characteristics that may impact the learning. (Describe)

- ❖ Describe your students in terms of their current academic abilities, usual behavior, motivation.
- ❖ Describe students' readiness for the objectives and expected behaviors incorporated in the lesson. Do you feel that all learners are ready for this lesson?
- ❖ How have you determined that these students are ready for this lesson? How did you acquire this information? Any type of formal or informal preassessment?
- ❖ What prior knowledge or skills should these students possess in order to be successful in this lesson? Are there any students whom you anticipate will struggle with this lesson? Are there any students whom you know have already mastered this information (or have mastered these skills)? Are there any students with special needs, talents, or backgrounds that may affect the lesson?
- ❖ In what ways did your knowledge of your students affect your planning of this lesson? (e.g., academic and cultural background, student interests)?
- ❖ (If students are to be in cooperative groups/teams) How did you determine team membership?

Envision strategies and behaviors to facilitate student's performance of desired behaviors. (Predict)

- ❖ As you envision this lesson, what do you see yourself doing to produce those student outcomes?*
- ❖ What instructional strategies do you plan to use? What alternative strategies did you consider?
- ❖ Have you identified any ways that ____ (innovative strategies, technology, culturally relevant teaching, multiple intelligences) could be meaningfully incorporated?

Describe the sequence in which the lesson will occur and Anticipate the duration of activities. (Sequence & Estimate)

- ❖ What will you be doing first? Next? Last? How will you close the lesson?*
- ❖ As you envision the opening of the lesson, how long do you anticipate that will take?*
- ❖ What about the other activities (time frame) and materials (and/or equipment)?

Translate the purposes of the lesson into descriptions of desirable and observable student behaviors. (Translate)

- ❖ As you see the lesson unfolding, what will students be doing?*
- ❖ During the lesson activities, how will students process the information (or practice the skills)?
- ❖ What student behaviors will help you determine if they are engaged in the lesson as you hoped?

Formulate procedures for assessing outcomes (Envision, operationally define, and set criteria).

- ❖ What should you see students doing or hear them saying that will tell you the lesson is successful?
- ❖ In what ways will you formally assess students' achievement on objectives? retention? application?
- ❖ As the lesson is proceeding, how will you determine if student understanding (or success) is

acceptable?

As closure, the Mentor/Coach could ask: "If I could focus on any aspect of the lesson that would be especially helpful to you, what would it be?" "Do you have any particular concerns about this lesson or these students?"

Reflecting Conference Mediation Questions

These questions are only examples and not meant to be prescriptive or complete. The purpose is to show how skilled coaches intentionally pose questions that help the novice to:

Express feelings about the lesson. (Assess)

- ❖ As you reflect back on the lesson, how do you feel it went? What is the basis for your feelings?

What student and teacher behaviors were observed during the lesson to support those feelings. (Recall/Relate)

- ❖ What did you see students doing (or hear them saying) that made you feel that way?
- ❖ How well do you feel you met the needs of all students in this lesson (e.g., ability, gender, interest, cultural background)?
- ❖ What effect do you feel that your ___ (behaviors, actions, strategies) had on the students and their learning?

Compare observed student and teacher behavior with desired behavior. (Compare)

- ❖ How did your students' performance (involvement, response, success) compare with what you thought would happen?
- ❖ How did what you planned compare with what you actually did?

Make inferences about the achievement of the purposes of the lesson. (Infer)

- ❖ As you reflect on the objectives for this lesson, what can you say about your students' achievement of them? (the class as a whole or specific students or groups of students)

Become aware of and monitor one's own thinking during the lesson. (Metacognition)

- ❖ What were you thinking when you decided to change the design of the lesson?
- ❖ What were you aware of that students were doing that made you change the lesson?

Analyze why desired student behaviors were or were not achieved. (Analyze)

- ❖ What hunches do you have to explain why some students performed as you had hoped while others did not? What specific actions or information support this hunch?

Draw causal relationships. (Cause-effect)

- ❖ What did you do (or not do) to produce the results you wanted?
- ❖ What impact did focusing on students' ___ (e.g., interests, cultures, community) have on the lesson?

Synthesize meaning from analysis of this lesson. (Synthesize)

- ❖ As you reflect on this discussion, what insights are you discovering about your students? planning? assessment techniques? questioning? monitoring?

Prescribe alternative teaching strategies, behaviors, or conditions. (Self-prescription)

- ❖ As you plan future lessons, what ideas (content, instructional strategies, culturally relevant teaching) have you developed that might be carried forth to the next lesson or other lessons?

- ❖ If you were to teach this lesson again, what would you do the same? Differently?
- ❖ What future plans do you have to help students retain and apply this information and these skills?

As closure to the conference, it is helpful to ask for feedback about the effects of this coaching session and any suggestions for improved conferencing skills. Ask questions such as, “What has this coaching session done for you?” “What is it that I did (or didn’t) do to assist you?” “What could I do differently in the future?”

Reflection for the Mentor-Coach

These questions are intended to promote the coach’s reflection and/or self-assessment. The questions convey criteria for a quality experience.

Planning Conference

- ❖ Does the novice have a clearer understanding of the lesson (about the learners, about the curriculum, about the objectives)?
- ❖ Is the novice more aware of the connection between students’ needs and abilities and the instructional objectives and strategies?
- ❖ Has the novice anticipated potential flaws or inadequacies and made needed adjustments?
- ❖ Has the novice developed refinements in terms of strategies or time frames, etc.?
- ❖ Is the novice alert to decisions that may need to be made interactively as the lesson progresses?
- ❖ Is the novice more skilled at envisioning what will take place during the lesson?
- ❖ Is the novice developing self-coaching skills (becoming more automatic in thinking about and responding to critical aspects of the planning process)?

Reflecting Conference

- ❖ Was the novice actively engaged in the analysis and problem solving?
- ❖ Is the novice at a new and higher level of awareness (or consciousness) about the teaching and learning process?
- ❖ Does the novice have new insights in his/her teaching?
- ❖ Does the novice have an enhanced feeling of efficacy, problem solving ability, flexibility in thinking and identifying alternative instructional strategies?
- ❖ Does the novice own the recommendations and express commitment to carrying them out?
- ❖ Is there a stronger professional and trusting relationship between the mentor and novice as a result of these interactions and activities?
- ❖ Is the novice developing reflective skills (becoming more automatic in thinking about and responding to critical aspects of the teaching and learning process)?

Reference:

Mary Ann Blank & Cheryl Kershaw

Raising the Bar Mentor Workshop

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