Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse

Facilitating Teacher Study Groups

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When was the last time you identified a goal that you planned to accomplish through self-selected, self-directed commitment, study, and action? Think about a New Year's resolution you have made for a healthier diet or more exercise. If you are like us, experiences when we work alone yield low returns because we are not always motivated to follow through. Have you, like us, however, been more successful when you joined a group?

Now think about the power of shared experiences with texts. J. K. Rowling's texts cause parents to allow young teens to stand in line at bookstores at midnight–and then actually purchase more than one copy of the same hardback book–and then read all night! Oprah Winfrey, whose famous adult book club began in 1996, is now a virtual rainmaker in the publishing industry; her selections are instant best sellers, no matter now dense or obscure. Scores of adults faithfully combine learning with fellowship in monthly book clubs, sometimes reading nonfiction tomes they would never have tackled without the support of the group. We hazard a guess that it is the shared experience, rather than the characteristics of the texts themselves, that maintains momentum in these adult book clubs. That shared experience includes respect, choice, voice, and personal connections. We are learning to harness those characteristics of shared experience as we engage with teachers in extended study groups; in this brief, we will share what we have learned in our work and from the work of others.

Although literacy coaching means many different things, all coaching initiatives have one common commitment: the goal of building teacher expertise. In our work as coaches and with coaches, we have relied on teacher study groups as a main strategy for accomplishing this task. Our understanding of the potential for study groups has expanded over time; our current vision combines ideas from real-world book clubs with ideas from the adult learning and professional development literature, and then adds a dash of compassion for the complex and difficult world of everyday teaching. This recipe yields a flexible set of recommendations that can help coaches launch or refresh teacher study groups.

Respect

Coaches can plan study groups that respect adult learners. There is rich literature on literature circles and book clubs for children (e.g., Daniels, 1994; McMahon & Raphael, 1997) and on cooperative learning activities (e.g., Guthrie, et al., 2004; Slavin, 1995). Although literacy coaches might be tempted to employ strategies from that literature so that they model literacy practices that teachers might later incorporate into their own teaching, we think this move is a mistake: a truly successful teacher study group must honor principles of adult learning. Adult learning, and specifically teacher learning, *must* be grounded and connected directly in real life experience; didactic approaches, with a top-down structure and focus, do not engage adults in deep learning experiences. Rather, previous knowledge and expertise, internal motivation, self-direction, and problem-solving (Terehoff, 2002) should be at the heart of the study group plan. Therefore, while many of our recommendations are related to concepts in literature circles and cooperative learning techniques in the literature for children, we translate them for adult learners.

Coaches can plan study groups that respect teachers' identities. It may be that coaches employ study groups as

Respecting Adult Learners

1. **Adopt the stance of co-learner rather than teacher.**
2. **Connect the study group to a real-life issue in the school.**
3. **Use the first study group session to set goals, create a timeline, and set at least one individual responsibility for each participant.**
4. **Have a product in mind, one that each participant can use (e.g., a set of lesson plans, a new schedule).**
5. **Revisit the goals and timeline at the start of each session, allowing participants to give an update. Amend plans to accommodate new ideas.**

part of an overall strategy for instructional change. When they do that, they must not tread on teachers' self-efficacy and identity as professionals. Rather, a collaborative study group can engage teachers in building, rather than tearing down, their concept of self as professional.

Coaches can plan study groups that respect teachers' time. Unfortunately, teachers encounter many "professional development" experiences that are poorly planned, poorly executed, and poorly matched to their real-world needs. Successful study groups break that mold. They have mutually-established goals, clear and up-front procedures, and expectations of relevance to problems that teachers agree are important.

Coaches can respect teachers as co-learners. Coaches bring specialized knowledge and skills to the study group but so do the other participants. We have found more success when we learn with teachers than when we are directive only from our own expertise. If coaches are conscious and verbal about their own learning in the study group, the climate becomes more collaborative. Other participants get the clear signal that the group is formed not to review what participants already know or should know, but to engage everyone in generating new knowledge.

Choice

With a coach or group of teachers new to study groups as a component of professional support, starting small may be helpful. It can also help the coach to establish a climate of choice. Adults are more likely to become fully engaged in professional learning when they can exercise choice, including whether they will participate or not. If a coach can juggle more than one group at a time, teachers have additional choices. A relatively low-risk way to start is with a children's or young adult literature book club; coaches can establish relationships with teachers and build knowledge of literature (Boccuzzi-Reichart, 2005; George, 2001; Roberts & Pruitt, 2003). Choosing to join such a study group is relatively low-stakes for teachers–learning more about literature does not necessitate broad instructional changes–and it can be a way for a coach to get a foot in the door for less-comfortable topics. However, researchers have successfully engaged groups of teachers in book clubs focused on very complex and potentially uncomfortable issues–like race, identity, and culture. These clubs have taken adult learning and reflection about literature as their focus, but have successfully influenced instruction in powerful ways (Florio-Ruane & Raphael, 2001).

Richard Stiggins, an expert on assessment, proposes a structure for development of literacy assessment, a real-world need in many schools, that combines a traditional professional development workshop – in our case led by the coach – with a commitment to classroom-based, individual experimentation and reflection, and team meetings. Interestingly, he calls for the team meetings to be entirely

based on choice, formed temporarily for members to reflect on what they are learning in their classrooms (Stiggins, 1999). Such an approach could be facilitated by a coach who arranges time and groupings in response to participant interest.

In many settings, though, the administration has made a whole-school commitment to study groups. Models such as Whole Faculty Study Group (WFSG) (Murphy, 1997) are more and more common. These groups typically link teachers across grades and content areas to build expertise in meeting student needs. They meet for one hour each week to work together. A unique aspect of the WFSG model is that each teacher has a turn in taking on a facilitative role for a study group meeting. In this respect, every member of the faculty is provided the opportunity to showcase a certain area of expertise and develop leadership skills within the larger learning community (Roberts & Pruitt, 2003). In models like WFSG, coaches can be involved in groups as members, rather than as leaders.

Faculties find time for meetings in creative ways. Some schools replace contract time used for faculty meetings with study group time. Some schools have early dismissal one day each week. Others block their specials classes so that all teachers in a particular group have the same planning period. In some schools paraprofessionals rotate around the school, freeing each group for one hour at a time. Such creative and systemic approaches integrate the study group into the regular business of school and provide coaches opportunities for building real momentum (Murphy, 1997).

Although coaches cannot give teachers choice about participating in WFSGs, coaches in those settings can give choice about what teachers read or do. We have found "free-for-all" text selection unproductive. Potentially, teachers choose texts for study that are not associated with the goals of the school or the needs of their learners. However, we have found proposing a small set of choices, each of which would be productive, to be very useful. The coach can do the initial legwork, finding a set of texts related to the school's goals, reading them, and providing brief descriptions. Then teachers can make a final selection through discussion or voting.

Another form of choice may be especially appropriate for pre-set groupings, such as middle school teams. Many schools are organized so that teams of teachers work together, weekly or biweekly, in study group formats. For these groups, choice in type of study can be powerful. We interpret the term "study group" broadly; the only requirement is that the group work together to learn something. They may work on a variety of projects, each of which is a meaningful chance to build expertise. They may choose to study state or district standards, with the goal of producing a useful pacing guide (Gabriel, 2005). They may choose to study student achievement data, with the goal of designing differentiated instruction (e.g., McDonald, Mohr, Dichter, & McDonald, 2003). They may choose to study curriculum materials, with the goal of making informed choices (e.g., Carr, Herman, & Harris, 2005). They may choose to read a professional book with the goal of reflecting on their current practices and considering changes (e.g., Roberts & Pruitt, 2003; Sweeney, 2003). Even though group membership, and perhaps even meeting schedules, are fixed for all, the coach can ensure that the study group allows choice in its focus and in its products.

Incorporating choice

1. **If possible, allow teachers to join study groups voluntarily.**
2. **If the study group is going to read, provide several options of texts; do not participate in the final selection process.**
3. **If the study group is ongoing and mandatory, provide choice in the object of study: curriculum, assessment, or research-based professional books are all appropriate choices.**

Even if a coach is to respect adult learners and allow them choice, interactions need some structure. The overarching goal of the study group is enhancing the expertise of the individuals in the group, building from their individual efforts with collaborative ones. To accomplish that goal, all learners must have voice during the meetings. Without structure, some participants will not be active, and their ideas will not enrich the discussion. Without structure, the goals of the study group may not be realized in the time allotted. Coaches can provide structure without being didactic; structure can facilitate collaboration and goal-oriented discussion.

One way to provide for voice is to structure time. A one-minute review of the goal of the group and then an agenda for how time will be used in the day's session can provide just enough structure to ensure productive discussion. The coach can ask another group member to be the timekeeper each day in order for the coach not to be seen as a task master.

Another way to provide for voice is to structure tasks. If individuals in the group are responsible in advance for preparing some particular aspect of the groups' work (e.g., summarizing a chapter, answering a question, writing a unit overview), and then allotted time to share on a set agenda, all have a planned voice in the meeting time.

Planning for Voice

1. **Structure the time for the meetings.**
2. **Assign individual or paired tasks that are then shared.**
3. **Refer often and objectively to the goals of the group.**

A choir can include many teacher voices; those voices can create cacophony or harmony. Coaches can plan for both voice and closure in each study group session by planning a summary and next steps. Again, repeating the goal of the prod when teachers veer off topic.

Personal Connections

One of the most challenging aspects of teacher study group facilitation comes directly from the characteristics of adult learners–they bring experience to the study group table, and they need the study group to connect with, or build on, that experience. All experiences, however, are not of the same quality, are not equally consistent with the group's goals, and are not equally useful to the group's planned product. Silencing unproductive talk, though, is counterproductive because it saps the strength of professional relationships and fosters a hostile and unproductive learning environment.

We have used several formats to direct personal connections in positive ways. One common response to working with professional texts is making a weak connection to the author's warrant but using most of the study group time to justify the status quo. "This is no different from what we already do" is a comment that a coach might hear from a teacher whose instruction bears no resemblance to the author's ideas. To avoid such uncomfortable situations, we have structured discussions with a protocol: an individual first summarizes an author's idea or concept and then provides one way that it is similar to current knowledge and practice and one way that it is different. This very simple structure provides space for personal connections and for new ideas.

Another way to facilitate positive personal connections is joint construction of guiding questions. Coaches and teachers might ask: What would be most challenging about trying this? What support would we need to try this? Why would it be worthwhile to try this? How could we adapt this idea to make it work best in our classrooms? All of these questions combine attention to new ideas with the realities of the participants' knowledge, skills, and resources.

When student data or work samples are the object of study, personal connections might lead teachers to share biases about students in order to end the discussion. "That child

Planning for Personal Connections

1. **Construct open-ended guiding questions to guide discussions about texts.**
2. **Adopt rules for discussing student achievement data or work samples.**

simply is incapable of high-level thinking." "There is a lot going on at home." "We have to have realistic expectations." Because these very real connections are difficult to counter productively, it may be best to set up norms for ways to discuss data. The norms might include up-front commitments to agree that all students are capable of high achievement, that instruction and school experience are powerful tools, and that discussion should concentrate on things that the team can control – namely, its own actions.

Accepting Reluctance

The best-laid plans for teacher study groups will not be successful for every teacher. We know coaches who assume that a study group has failed when even one of the adult learners is not engaged, an assumption teachers sometimes make when they fail to reach a student. We must consider, however, that when the object of study is linked to substantial changes in teaching, teachers will not embrace tasks equally. Teachers have variable levels of commitment and motivation; they come to study groups with personal sets of strengths and weaknesses. Literacy coaches must accept this fact, just as they ask teachers to accept individual differences in children.

Accepting reluctance is not the same thing as ignoring it (McKenna & Walpole, 2008). We work to draw in every adult learner to the norms and goals of the group. However, coaches may have to differentiate. Personal, private discussions (e.g., "I noticed that you seemed distracted today. Is there something that I can do to make the work of the group more productive for you?") may be a way to communicate to teachers that the coach actually notices them, cares about them, and wants to make it possible for them to contribute.

One common occurrence in new study groups is that reluctant teachers fail to do their homework. We encourage coaches to anticipate and to plan for this lack of preparation. For example, if some teachers haven't done the reading, a coach might say, "I sense that some of you were too busy to do the reading. We can't move forward without it. Let's use our time right now for you to do the reading, and all of us will meet for a discussion tomorrow." This statement communicates that the group agreements will not be ignored, even if teachers resist. The tasks will simply take more time.

Accepting Reluctance

1. **Accept that teachers have different levels of commitment and motivation to engage in the study group.**
2. **Accept that teachers come to study groups with personal sets of strengths and weaknesses.**
3. **Make personal connections with individual teachers to facilitate engagement.**
4. **Plan strategies for accomplishing homework during the study group if necessary.**

Getting Started

Coaches may have to sell the idea of facilitating study groups as a good use of professional development time. After all, study groups demand teacher time, which could be used in other ways. We think, though, that study groups are an ideal vehicle for meeting the National Staff Development Council's Standards for Staff Development (2001). In terms of context, they organize teachers into communities that are continuing and collaborative. In terms of process,

they provide time and information for applying research to teacher decision making, and they build teacher capacity for meaningful collaboration, both with the coach and with peers. In terms of content, they are a flexible vehicle for considering research-based instructional approaches.

Respecting adult learners, incorporating choice, planning for voice, and thinking through strategies to deal productively with teacher reluctance are considerations for coaches to tackle up front. First, they can work with building administrators to create a time and a place for study. Next, they can decide how groups will be formed and how long they will work together. Then, they can work with each group to select a goal and set a syllabus of tasks to accomplish it. Together, they can establish group norms. And finally, coaches and teachers can reflect on the successes and failures of their group, engaging in continuous improvement.

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CHAPTER 5

CONDUCTING INSTRUCTIONAL DIALOGUE

The previous chapter considered the role of the coach in gathering information while working alongside the teacher. It explored the questions the coach asks and how those questions support the plan for instructional dialogue. It discussed how the job-embedded work can look. This chapter focuses on the role of the coach in instructional dialogue.

As noted earlier, instructional dialogue is a structured conversation about teaching and learning that provides feedback to the teacher. The measure of improvement is always student learning. It is neither an interrogation nor a therapy session. It's a dialogue between colleagues learning from each other to do their jobs better. Instructional dialogue, it was noted, is an opportunity for teachers through the mentorship and facilitation of a coach to think about their practice and ways to improve it. Figure 5.1 provides an overview of the cycle of teacher development described in this book.

The job of the coach during instructional dialogue is to:

- Lead the structured conversation
- Listen carefully for what the teacher already knows and what the teacher can learn next
- Know when to ask questions and when to provide answers and strategies for implementation
- Support the teacher in making a direct link between his or her learning and the learning of the students.

In this chapter we examine instructional dialogue and the implications for the work of the coach.

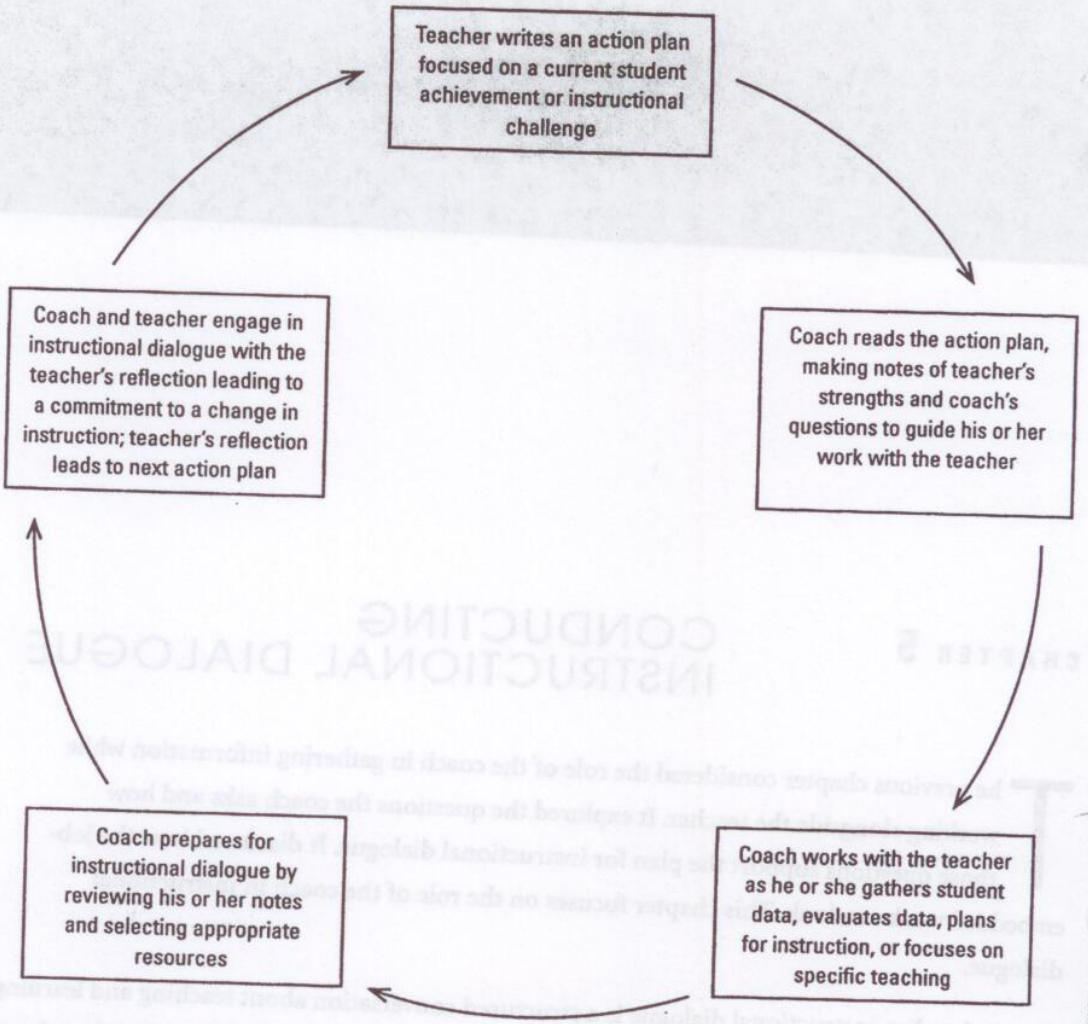

Figure 5.1: Teacher development cycle

A Structured Conversation

Chapter 2 described the roles and responsibilities of the teacher and the coach. Leading the "structured conversation" is one of these responsibilities. A regular time is established for instructional dialogue. This means that the teacher and the coach have a scheduled and uninterrupted

opportunity for discussion and feedback. Schools arrange for this time in many different ways. Some schools provide classroom coverage immediately following the work alongside the teacher. Other schools see the dialogue as part of the teacher's planning time one day per week or every other week. Regardless of how it is scheduled, it's the regularity of feedback that is important.

Instructional dialogue is systematic and focused. Because it is preceded by the teacher's action plan and job-embedded work with the teacher and the coach, both participants can have certain expectations. It will be focused on the current challenge the teacher is experiencing and has identified as a focus for coaching. It will be supported by the data the coach has collected while working with the teacher. It results in the teacher making a commitment to change in instruction. That change is expected to increase student achievement.

Listening and Questioning Effectively

One of the most important skills a coach can develop is learning how to listen. Listening effectively is a highly developed skill. Listening allows the coach to identify an entry point to the teacher's learning. When given time to talk about his or her teaching, the teacher usually shares a specific challenge in the first few minutes of the conversation. A skilled listener can quickly confirm strengths and uncover these challenges if a teacher is unable to.

The coach can begin the dialogue in a number of ways to get the conversation started. For example, a teacher who is gathering formative assessment data might be invited to talk about "how it went" or "what you learned about your students." A teacher who is exploring questioning in small group instruction might be asked, "What were some of the things you heard your kids say today?" The teacher selecting resources for his instruction might be asked to share what he's thinking about now, since he and the coach worked together to select literacy resources. These initial questions are designed to be open ended enough to encourage conversation. The purpose is to make the beginning of the dialogue risk free; an opportunity for a teacher to reflect on the challenge being experienced and what is needed to overcome it.

Once the teacher begins to talk, the coach listens carefully. For many coaches, this is challenging. Some coaches might feel that just listening means that they are not doing their job. On the

contrary, appropriate, meaningful feedback means coaches have to listen actively for the right time to provide that feedback.

Questions are an integral part of instructional dialogue. It's the coach's ability to listen that leads to the appropriate questions. The questions the coach asks during instructional dialogue come from what the teacher says. The questions aren't scripted; they are based upon the direction the coach has determined for the dialogue and the responses of the teacher. They are not the "guess what's in my head" kind of questions, but are those that uncover the fundamental beliefs teachers have and challenge them to extend their thinking. Note the following exchange between Alex, a teacher seeking feedback about her students' engagement in independent work, and myself.

Listening and Questioning in Action

Marilyn: How did you feel about your students' engagement during independent work time today?

This question confirms the teacher's action plan and provides time for her to talk.

Alex: Not much differently than I feel any day. I can tell you right now the names of the students who are working hard and seem involved in their work. And I can tell you the names of the students who look like they are wasting their time and mine too!

What the teacher says about knowing who was engaged and who was not engaged leads to my next question.

Marilyn: Let's talk about some of those kids who are engaged and some you feel aren't engaged. If we compare our observations, maybe we can come to some conclusions.

Alex: That's easy. (She begins by talking about the students who are not engaged. I suggest a shift in focus in the conversation.)

I suggest this shift in focus because I want Alex to begin with her students' strengths. She needs to see that she has contributed to what her students are doing well.

Marilyn: Let's start by talking about the students who are engaged first.

Alex: That's easy, too. (Alex talks about the students who are consistently engaged in their independent work. She names some of the same students that I have interviewed.)

Stopping the conversation and asking the teacher to analyze what is working in her classroom helps her focus on his learners' strengths. It also leads to the establishment of expectations for all students based upon the behaviors of some students.

Marilyn: I came to the same conclusion about some of those same students. Let me share with you what I asked them and what they said. That might help us come up with some behaviors we want all of your students to have. I asked the students three questions: "What are you doing? Why are you doing it?" and "What do you expect to accomplish today?"

Let's start with Tanisha. She was reading independently when I interviewed her. I asked her what she was doing and she said, "Reading *Winn Dixie*" (DiCamillo 2000). I asked her why she was reading this book. She replied, "I like books about girls my age and dogs. My teacher told us about this book. In fact, he read some of it aloud to us and I thought I'd like it. I just started it but already I like it. I was right."

I asked her one more question: "What do you expect to accomplish today in reading?" She answered, "I want to read until I find out if the girl's dad lets her keep Winn Dixie. Did you know this dog was named for a grocery store?" She laughed.

I share a few more examples of students engaged in reading. The students make similar comments.

Marilyn: What are you thinking now?

Alex: Can I clone those kids? That's just how I would like all my students to talk about their independent reading.

Marilyn: I couldn't agree with you more. Let's figure out what they were doing. What were some of the commonalities? For instance, what expectations had they set for themselves about their reading?

Alex: Well, they all knew that they had to find a book that was interesting to them.

Marilyn: So that's one thing we have to determine. Are the disengaged kids interested in their independent reading books?

Alex: Not only interested, but are they able to read them and make meaning.

Marilyn: Why don't you take a minute and write down what you are thinking.

I remind Alex to take a few notes so that she has something to refer back to after our dialogue is finished. I also use her notes as an assessment sample—an opportunity to confirm that she understands what I think she understands.

Alex takes a few notes. She writes, "Students must be interested in their books and be able to make meaning from them."

Marilyn: What else were those students doing? Remember when I asked Tanisha what she expected to accomplish today? She said, "I want to read until I find out if the girl's dad lets her keep Winn Dixie. Did you know this dog was named for a grocery store?"

Alex: She was setting a goal. So what I want my students to think about is what they want to accomplish as readers. Not how many pages they'll read per day, which is what I'm having them do now. That takes very little thinking. Tanisha was thinking about what she wanted to find out as she was making her way through the beginning of *Because of Winn Dixie.*

Marilyn: This is what I hear you saying. By listening to what those kids said, you have come up with three expectations for all of your students: books that interest them; books they can read with understanding; and being able to determine what they want to accomplish as a reader to set a goal for their independent reading time. Am I right?

Alex: Yes, but I think I've told them that a bunch of times.

Alex: I'll need to meet with some of the students individually who don't have a book that's working, but I bet I could talk with some in small groups. I could also talk with the whole group about why I choose books to read and how I know if they are working for me.

Marilyn: Who else could share some experiences in book selection?

I'm reminding Alex that she knows another way to save instructional time. She often has students provide demonstrations.

Alex: Oh–my kids who are engaged. I could ask them the same questions you asked them, but do it in front of the whole group.

Marilyn: And don't forget why Tanisha decided to read *Winn Dixie.*

Alex: Yes! She wanted to read it after she heard me reading a portion to the class. I could do that with a lot of high-interest books.

Marilyn: It sounds like you have some great ideas. Let's look at how we could plan for them over the next week–what you'll do with the whole group and with individuals.

We spend the next ten minutes planning for the week and setting out the support she might need. Then I conclude this part of the dialogue.

I bring the dialogue to closure by summarizing what has been learned, why it has been learned, and the commitment to change in practice. My goal is that Alex will implement this new learning.

Marilyn: So let's think about the steps we went through today and why. First we talked about what your students are doing who are really engaged. What did that enable us to do?

Alex: We could figure out what we wanted all students to do.

Marilyn: Yes, we basically set expectations for independent reading. What else did we do?

Alex: We determined how to communicate those expectations to the students and planned for it.

Marilyn: Let's jot those two steps down. They seem pretty simple, and I bet we could apply them to other areas of your room once we work through independent reading.

Alex and I are very interested in monitoring the result of this action plan, so I say to her: "Let's jot those two steps down on your next action plan."

We both knew that a higher level of engagement from her students would have a big impact on her ability to meet with small groups and individuals. Alex spent the next two weeks setting expectations and providing demonstrations for the whole group. At the same time she was collecting data about the readers who were not engaged in independent reading. Eventually, all but three of her students were able to remain engaged in independent reading. Alex planned daily for monitoring those three students to increase their levels of engagement.

An additional benefit of her work was the increased fluency in reading of her students. Because they were reading more often and for longer periods of time, they were able to read more fluently, which also improved their comprehension.

When to Listen; When to Question; When to Tell

Previously, feedback was defined as the opportunity for teachers to reflect on their own practices with support from a colleague. Teachers are provided with the appropriate amount of support they need for learning. Learning occurs in different ways for different individuals. This chapter has discussed the importance of the coach's skill in knowing how to listen. It has also emphasized the need for the coach to know when to ask questions appropriate to the level of the teacher's current knowledge. It's just as important for the coach to know when to let the teacher work through an issue him- or herself; in other instances simply to tell. The effective coach knows when to listen, when to ask, and when to tell.

For instance, a teacher had pulled together a reading group and requested that the coach observe how well she had reached her teaching objective. In the lesson, her students sailed right through the reading with no difficulty whatsoever. The teacher turned to the coach and said, "My problem isn't with the teaching objective, it's with the selection of text. That's what I need to focus on." Here, all the teacher required was listening to herself and acting on her intuition.

Teachers often learn by talking through and responding to the questions that are posed to them. A teacher was concerned that his students were not focused on meaning when they were reading. The coach noted each of the teacher's questions asked during a reading group and found that they were mostly questions about reading accurately. By re-reading the teacher's questions and asking if they were focused on meaning or words, the coach allowed the teacher to see that he was more focused on his students getting the words right than on them making sense of the book. The teacher was able to restructure his questions to be more meaningful. Here, the coach was able to allow the teacher to reflect by noting the questions the teacher asked.

In other situations, a teacher comes close to knowing but needs someone to tell. In this instance, a teacher had come to the realization during a dialogue that spellers had to be able to ask themselves if the word "looked right" in order to proofread their writing for spelling. When the coach asked how this might look in her classroom, the teacher said she had few ideas. Here, the coach simply gave the teacher some strategies to try with her students.

Improvement in Student Learning

Teachers' commitment to change in instruction occurs when they see themselves putting into practice what they have learned. Teachers begin to understand something new and see it as something they can add to what they do already. The test is leaving a dialogue with the confidence that they can put their new learning into place immediately. An effective coach should be able to tell when a teacher's learning occurs. What does it sound like when the teacher gets it? What support will the teacher need to put it into practice?

Coaches who understand that the test of effective teaching is increased student achievement use student data as the basis for dialogue. Student data uncovers the gap between what teachers know and what they need to know to ensure student growth.

In an earlier example, there was a teacher who was seeing little growth in her students' writing. The coach collected information in the classroom on both the quantity and quality of writing. She found that few students were writing daily. Bringing that student data to the dialogue and

sharing it with the teacher allowed them to think together about strategies and set expectations with students about daily writing.

In another example, a teacher was concerned by the lack of growth in his least-proficient readers. The coach administered a running record (Clay 2000) to some of his less-proficient students. These running records were useful data in the instructional dialogue and provided information to both coach and teacher for possible next steps.

Student data helps uncover a teacher's concern and provides content and support regarding how this might be more effective for students' learning during the dialogue. A skilled coach supports the teacher in knowing what data to collect from students and how to recognize success in student learning.

The teacher who wished to ensure that writing was occurring daily developed clear expectations with her students. She then monitored the daily writing with a monitoring sheet. Each student was asked at the beginning of the writing period what part of the writing process he or she would be working on that day. During the last ten minutes of the writing period the teacher monitored her students' progress. The coach and teacher reviewed this monitoring sheet over the next two weeks and found that most students were having problems with topic selection. Further work on topics for writing was the beginning of improving the quality of student writing.

The teacher who lacked progress with his less-proficient readers made a commitment to learn more about the analysis of running records. He administered running records over the following week on these students and worked with the coach on this analysis. He was then able to establish more accurate teaching objectives for this group of students, which led to growth in their learning.

Student data becomes the evidence that a change in the teacher's instruction has had an impact. Deciding what is expected in students' learning allows the teacher to take a small enough step to experience success quickly. Effective coaches know what realistic expectations will look like and what data needs to be collected to show the evidence of growth.

Colleagues Learning to Do Their Jobs Better

The purpose of coaching is to support teachers as they extend and refine their knowledge and application of effective instruction. As a result, student learning increases. Without coaching, teachers are expected to do this alone. The skill of the coach lies in developing a relationship of trust and confidence that enables work with the teacher to be collaborative. It doesn't work if teachers believe that coaching is something that is being done to them.

"We" is important for coaches. Making a commitment to change is much easier when teachers feel as if they are doing it with someone who is a supportive colleague. Note the two conversations below between coach and teacher. Ask yourself which conversation feels more inclusive.

Coach: I want you to see this running record I took on one of your less-proficient students. It can really tell you what their challenges are. (The coach reads through the running record.) So, what do you think you should do next?

Teacher: Learn about running records, I guess.

Coach: If you take running records on some of your students next week, I can help you learn to analyze them.

In this example the coach is telling the teacher what to do. The message is: I'll tell you what to do because I know and then I'll check to see if you have done it.

The following conversation is on the same topic.

Coach: I was thinking about the challenge you are facing with your struggling readers and thought about an assessment tool I've used to help get to the bottom of the challenges these readers are facing. I took a couple of running records on your kids and wanted to share what I found to see if it will help us. (The coach talks aloud through the analysis of the running record and describes what she saw the student doing as a developing reader.) What are you thinking?

Teacher: I didn't really know they weren't making sense of what they were reading until I saw what you did.

Coach: I'm thinking that if we took some more running records over the next week on the other kids in that group, then we could work together to analyze them. Are you comfortable taking them?

Teacher: I can take them, but I'm not comfortable with what you just did.

Coach: I can understand that. It took me awhile to remember how to analyze too, but if we can do it together it should be quick and easy.

Similar outcomes were established in these two conversations. The difference is in the style of support. In both, the teacher committed to taking running records on his less-proficient students, and the running record would be analyzed. The latter example suggests colleagues working together. Coaches consider that their role is to help teachers solve problems that they are unable to solve alone. Effective coaches work in collaboration with the teachers.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 have examined the role of the coach in planning for instructional dialogue. Chapter 6 shows a teacher and coach putting it all together.

PRINCIPLES OF ADULT LEARNING

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Part of being an effective instructor involves understanding how adults learn best. Compared to children and teens, adults have special needs and requirements as learners. Despite the apparent truth, adult learning is a relatively new area of study. The field of adult learning was pioneered by Malcom Knowles. He identified the following characteristics of adult learners:

- Adults are *autonomous* and *self-directed*. They need to be free to direct themselves. Their teachers must actively involve adult participants in the learning process and serve as facilitators for them. Specifically, they must get participants' perspectives about what topics to cover and let them work on projects that reflect their interests. They should allow the participants to assume responsibility for presentations and group leadership. They have to be sure to act as facilitators, guiding participants to their own knowledge rather than supplying them with facts. Finally, they must show participants how the class will help them reach their goals (e.g. via a personal goals sheet).
- Adults have accumulated a foundation of *life experiences* and *knowledge* that may include work-related activities, family responsibilities, and previous education. They need to connect learning to this knowledge/experience base. To help them do so, they should draw out participants' experience and knowledge which is relevant to the topic. They must relate theories and concepts to the participants and recognize the value of experience in learning.
- Adults are *goal-oriented*. Upon enrolling in a course, they usually know what goal they want to attain. They, therefore, appreciate an educational program that is organized and has clearly defined elements. Instructors must show participants how this class will help them attain their goals. This classification of goals and course objectives must be done early in the course.
- Adults are *relevancy-oriented*. They must see a reason for learning something. Learning has to be applicable to their work or other responsibilities to be of value to them. Therefore, instructors must identify objectives for adult participants before the course begins. This means, also, that theories and concepts must be related to a setting familiar to participants. This need can be fulfilled by letting participants choose projects that reflect their own interests.
- Adults are *practical*, focusing on the aspects of a lesson most useful to them in their work. They may not be interested in knowledge for its own sake. Instructors must tell participants explicitly how the lesson will be useful to them on the job.
- As do all learners, adults need to be shown *respect*. Instructors must acknowledge the wealth of experiences that adult participants bring to the classroom. These adults should be treated as equals in experience and knowledge and allowed to voice their opinions freely in class.