Definition of Coaching

Serene Koh and Susan B. Neuman
University of Michigan

As described in Joyce and Showers (1983), Mello (1984), and Smith and Acheson (1991), coaching provides professionals with the following opportunities:
- To receive support and encouragement through the opportunity to review experiences, discuss feelings, describe frustrations, and check perceptions with a partner
- To fine-tune skills or strategies through technical feedback and technical assistance from a coaching partner
- To analyze practices and decision making at a conscious level
- To adapt or generalize skills or strategies by considering what is needed to facilitate particular outcomes, how to modify the skill or practice to better fit interactions with specific families or practitioners, or what results may occur from using the skill or practice in different ways
- To reflect on what they perceive or how they make decisions, which helps improve their knowledge and understanding of professional practices and activities

Exemplary Elements of Coaching

1) On-site Coaching
- There is some literature to suggest that coaching which takes place in the teachers' own classroom is more effective because it allows the teacher to see elements of coaching put into practice in the here and now. It is also less disruptive of the teacher's schedule. On-site coaching also allows teachers to more specifically identify issues or areas of need within their classroom which can be improved by coaching. (Black *et al*, 2003)
- Teachers are more likely to "buy in" and change their own instructional practices when coaches come into their classrooms and model instructional techniques. Of all the techniques coaches employ, modeling instruction in individual classrooms is most likely to result in modifications in instructional practices and adherence to the instructional delivery formats. (Poglinco & Bach, 2004)
- Feger *et al* call this "demonstration" and "co-teaching" which can also allow teachers to experience a paradigm outside of their own (2004).
- Teachers often ask for a demonstration lesson because that's what they see as coaching or they want to assess a coach's credibility. Demonstrating a lesson can let a coach communicate to a teacher that she is willing to collaborate and take on the challenges the teacher tackles every day.
- Teachers reported that guidance from coaches in classrooms themselves were most valuable as these forms of coaching dealt with instruction specifically and enabled coaches to best identify areas where teachers' knowledge and capacity needed assistance. (Herll and O'Drobinak, 2004).

2) Coaching Should Be Balanced and Sustained
- The 9-month school calendar is indicted for not only limiting student learning but also teacher learning.
- Teachers generally have very sporadic summer learning for themselves unless they initiate it individually; basically, these are separate, discrete activities based on the individual teacher's motivation.
- When school ends in late May or early June teachers might have a short in-service day after which they are then are left alone for the long summer. Just before school starts in late August, teachers are generally infused with a rapid fire string of professional development activities completed in 1 or 2 days. This is done in preparation for the start of the new school year.
- However, research tells us that this type of temporary infusion of learning for teacher development does not work (Darling-Hammond, 1997).
- Research and proven practice provides several models for reallocating time within the year for learning and quality professional development. Some possible options are: balanced calendar and year-round education, expanded professional development hours and days, accumulated or banked time, alternative grouping, alternative scheduling, expanded staffing, and school-university partnerships. (Speck, 2002)

3) Good Coaches Don't Dictate
- They don't just dictate "the right answer," they facilitate other people's reflection. Good coaches are often the best teachers: Who listens to students? Who seeks to engender understanding in students, instead of looking for them to recite the right answers? The same behaviors make people good coaches. (Harwell-Kee, 1999)
- Good coaches must have the ability to know when to push and when to stand back and regroup in the long-term process of adopting new approaches to galvanize a school to function differently. To succeed, a coach must be a leader who is willing not to be recognized as such and, at the same time, who is able to foster leadership among teachers who rarely regard themselves as leaders. (Guiney, 2001)

4) Student Outcome Benefits from Strong Interaction with Coaches
- A study in Ontario investigated the conditions within which coaching was most effective in engendering positive student outcomes (Ross, 1992).
- The main findings are:
    o Student achievement is higher in the classrooms of teachers who interacted more extensively with their coaches;
    o Student achievement is higher in the classrooms of teachers with higher teacher efficacy beliefs;
    o All teachers, regardless of their level of efficacy, were more effective with increased contact with their coaches.
- One important aspect of this strong interaction is a high level of trust. More so than student learners, Adult learning is enhanced by behaviors that demonstrate respect, trust, and concern for the learner, and adults want to be the originators of their own learning - that is, involved in selecting objectives, content, activities, and assessment. (Herll and O'Drobinak, 2004)

5) Provide Descriptive Feedback
- Specifically, teachers find that immediacy of feedback to be very valuable in terms of interaction. (Ai and Rivera, 2003). Tips for giving descriptive feedback have been outlined by Gallacher (1995), Hutto et al. (1991), Schreiber (1990), and Wolfe (1994).
- The general guidelines for feedback include the following:
    a. be descriptive, not evaluative or judgmental;
    b. be specific rather than general;
    c. describe observable events or behaviors rather than give opinions;
    d. focus on behavior rather than the person;
    e. share information rather than give advice;
    f. explore alternatives rather than give the answer or solution (use "provisional" language);
    g. begin with positive information;
    h. describe observed relationships between behaviors or events so the partner can make cause-and-effect inferences; and
    i. offer the amount of information the receiver can use rather than the amount one would like to give.

6) Match/ Complement Teachers' Behavioral Style
- This requires the coach to modify the level of support and direction provided depending on the level of assistance teachers requests and on the amount of support the coach perceives is needed to accomplish the coaching process.
- The teacher's degree of self-direction often is influenced by several contextual variables, including knowledge and understanding of the topic or content, technical skills regarding a particular topic, sense of personal competence, and the context of the learning event (Gallacher, 1997).
- Complementing teachers' behavioral style or preferences is another specialized skill that coaches employ in matching the teachers' style. Coaches are to consider their partner's style and preference regarding interaction, the process for receiving information, the kind of information that would be most salient, methods for decision making, and ways to structure or organize coaching activities. For example, some teachers may prefer more details initially, while others prefer the "big picture" at the beginning. (Gallacher, 1995).

7) Promote Professional Reflection
- According to Gallacher (1995) and Swarzman (1993), reflection is a powerful impetus for continued personnel development and self-directed learning. The coach prompts and facilitates the teacher's analysis of his or her individual learning objectives, performance, and decision making regarding the use of particular techniques or practices.
- Through reflection, the teacher examines the effectiveness of particular methods or practices, interprets situations or events, and considers how values, expectations, and

beliefs influenced his or her choices and the situation. The coach promotes reflection by encouraging the teacher to recall a specific event in detail, examine feelings associated with the experience, and contemplate what he or she would do differently to be even more effective.
- Related to this is the ability of the coach to be a good listener and to allow time for teachers to reflect. Coaches must maintain a collaborative, trusting relationship with teachers so the teacher sees the coach's questions as prompts for reflection, not critical judgments that put the teacher on the defensive.
- For the coach, this means phrasing genuine questions for reflection rather than questions with a single correct answer, and waiting for the teacher to respond. Silence following a question can make a coach feel uncomfortable, but that may be time in which the teacher reflects. (Feger *et al*, 2004)

8) Coaches Must be Well-trained
- Coaches must have a solid repertoire of techniques to call upon. They must also be able to effectively critique and provide useful feedback to teachers. Both prior experience and individual personality factor into how coaches deal with the multiple demands of their role.
- Some skills/ knowledge coaches should be armed with:
    o Interpersonal skills
    o Content knowledge
    o Pedagogical knowledge
    o Knowledge of the curriculum
    o Awareness of coaching resources
    o Knowledge of the practice of coaching (Feger *et al*, 2004)

9) Good Coaching is Collaborative
- In a case study in Boston, researchers found that coaches who spent time talking and working with teachers on specific issues of assessment, curriculum and instruction were able to better effect positive results. This was accompanied by common planning sessions every day which coaches attend once a week. (Guiney, 2001). This is related to the notion that coaches cannot direct; teachers gain most from coaching if they are treated as equals even if they may be less experienced or knowledgeable as coaches.
- Another successful case study in Texas focused on coaches who regularly conducted debriefing sessions to hear the teacher's perception of their demonstration lessons and to share the coaches' own reflections, including how to use the experience to plan the next lesson. The coaches reflected on why they chose that particular lesson, how they planned its delivery and chose materials appropriate to the children's needs, and what they thought and did as the lesson progressed. Teachers found this kind of collaborative sharing very effective. (Redell, 2004).

10) Prioritize
- Research shows that good coaching is about identifying priorities, not just what areas of teacher practice require your help, but also in assisting teachers in identifying their own priority of needs in their training. (Herll and O'Drobinak, 2004).

- Coaches must dialogue with teachers about their perceived strengths and weaknesses not only individually but also in a group. Thereafter, coaches are to prioritize these needs in a way which will best benefit all teachers.

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