

COACHING APPROACHES

for Building Knowledge



**Leading
Educators**

Potential, ignited.

Acknowledgements

This tool reflects the contributions and support of many researchers and educators who are committed to strong teaching practice and equitable opportunity for every student.

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Our Coaching Philosophy

Coaching is one of many powerful levers schools can use to foster environments where every teacher and student ignites their potential. It encourages educators to continuously build on their strengths through reflection and discovery.

Leading Educators sees the combination of strong professional learning and regular instructional coaching as key to strengthening the instructional opportunities teachers provide to students. Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students disproportionately experience bias, low expectations, and less access to grade-appropriate work, so there is particular urgency for instructional shifts that meet their specific needs.

The Coaching Path



As you dig into this tool, you will notice nearly 30 suggested coaching practices and activities to meet a variety of specific coaching needs. To choose appropriately, we recommend following a four-part path that applies to every coaching approach:

- Prioritize the Person: Create space to check in with the person you are coaching. Personal connections enhance the relationship, and they can lead to a more open coaching experience.
- Prepare for Learning: Establish a foundational understanding of what will be necessary for Planning Together.
- Planning Together: Concretely apply the learning or plan for future application. This section includes practice opportunities.
- Purposeful Reflection: End every session by talking about the learning and the coaching experience. Name the follow up that will take place to move the learning into implementation.

Our coaching approach draws from our experiences in diverse schools, Wellman & Lipton's "Learning Focused Conversations", "The Cultural Proficiency Framework" from Lindsey, Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, and Terrell, the International Coaching Federation Competencies, and specific research in each identified approach. Strategic coaching requires clear intention. In this tool, we identify practices, guidance, and approaches that should be used as foundational options for coaching sessions to build on content and pedagogical content knowledge. While the examples focus on coaching teachers, the approaches and the coaching path are transferable to other coaching relationships.

Coaching Approaches for Building Knowledge

This tool is designed around the four key coaching approaches listed below: co-planning, modeling, observation and debrief, and artifact analysis. They can be used alone or in combination depending on the focus of your coaching experience. The next two pages provide context about the commonalities, differences, and most relevant applications.

Co-planning

Modeling

Observation & Debrief

Artifact Analysis

Promising practices in common:

For all of our approaches, there are 6 practices we hold to be true for effective coaching. These should be constant commitments among coaches regardless of the approach or the focus:

1

Equity is always present

Center equity as the ultimate goal of all coaching, seeking opportunities to highlight inequities and challenge teachers to build more equitable mindsets and practices.

2

Bite-sized is best

Focus on a discrete skill or connected skills, strategy, or aspect of content and planning that can be mastered within a few sessions and include follow up for accountability.

3

Ask, don't tell

Pose questions to teachers instead of leading with the answers: "How would you respond if...?"; "What are this lesson's key concepts?"; "What would you ask students here?"

4

Practice makes possible

Provide opportunities to immediately practice the skill or strategy name to reinforce their learning.

5

Relationships are key

Build trust and recognize the shared aims of coaching before going deep with any feedback or analysis to ensure that teachers can productively "hear" the input about their work and avoid feeling judged.

6

Identify and observe

Identify the next steps and observe the implementation first-hand if possible.

Guidance for Sequencing These Four Approaches

Because no single coaching approach is fully effective in isolation, coaches should sequence and use the approaches to maximize growth and development. Below is some guidance and general trends for how coaches have combined the inputs.

1

Diagnose before taking action

Coaching often starts with an initial observation, artifact analysis, or conversation to understand the current practice, strengths, growth areas, and potential goals.

2

Consider knowledge

Once goals are established, coaches often turn to co-planning or modeling. Co-planning is useful when there is already an understanding of the content or skill to develop, whereas modeling is best when they don't yet have that clarity.

3

Artifacts as onramp

Analyzing artifacts is especially helpful when someone is less receptive to direct feedback. It also works well with co-planning.

4

Grow, then measure

Use co-planning or modeling inputs to support development, and then use observations and debriefs to confirm the content or skill development and determine additional work.

5

Narrate the change

Many coaches close coaching cycles with artifact analysis. When closing, review the stated goal, reflect on the learning, highlight observable changes in instructional practice, and "connect the dots" to learning and future application.

Content-Focused Co-Planning

[Click here to listen](#)



Content-focused co-planning is side-by-side collaboration aimed at identifying key lesson content and developing the discrete instructional skills that are critical to high-quality instruction and that teachers can practice immediately.

PROMISING PRACTICES

1

Don't wing it

Take time to carefully plan and prepare for this approach.

2

Keep it concrete

Identify specific goals and action steps to make it clear.

3

Highlight principles of learning

Bring in research that deepens teachers' understanding of how students learn.

4

Customize to the teacher

Tailor to teachers' needs in one-on-one coaching sessions.

Virtual Consideration

Use a shared digital platform like a Google doc or Jamboard for co-planning and practice.

Research

Bambrick-Santoyo, P. (2016). Get better faster: A 90-day plan for coaching new teachers. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.

Gersten, R., Dimino, J., Jayanthi, M., Kim, J. S., & Santoro, L. E. (2010). Teacher study group: Impact of the professional development model on reading instruction and student outcomes in first grade classrooms. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47(3), 694-739.

WHEN TO USE THIS APPROACH:



You observe a virtual lesson and notice the teacher proceduralizing a conceptual standard. Student responses to the exit ticket also show a procedural approach to a conceptual math problem.



A teacher sends you their lesson plans for an upcoming virtual lesson, and you notice that the questions planned to guide the discussion of the selected text are all “right there” questions.



A teacher leader would like concrete support in how to incorporate look-fors and SEL into lesson plans, so that they can lead their team to do the same.

Modeling Instructional Content

Click here to listen 

Modeling instructional content refers to a direct instruction approach wherein someone with more experience demonstrates or narrates effective instructional strategies followed by a debrief and an opportunity to practice.

PROMISING PRACTICES

1

It's not about you

Keep the focus on the practice and give the teacher something to do while observing.

2

Name it

Offer a question focused on the specific skill or aspect of the content being modeled for the teacher to consider while observing.

3

Be reflective

Model not only the skill or practice but the process of reflecting on feedback as well.

4

Make it proximal

Modeling with the teacher's own students deepens insights.

WHEN TO USE THIS APPROACH:



In attempting to implement new learning on math discourse from a prior coaching session, a teacher plans questions to ask students, but you observe that the teacher doesn't actually ask them in instruction.



A teacher leader says, "Based on our shared learning, I know that I'm lowering the rigor of the text in my efforts to scaffold for my students." You do a co-planning session and observe the teacher leader's class afterwards. You notice that when a student struggles to answer a planned question, the teacher leader immediately reduces the rigor of the question.

Virtual Consideration

Record the model in advance to watch with the teacher and for reference after.

Research

Aguilar, E. (2013). *The art of coaching: Effective strategies for school transformation*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.

Gibbons, L. K., & Cobb, P. (2016). *Content-focused coaching: Five key practices*. *The Elementary School Journal*, 117(2), 237-260.

Observation and Debrief

Click here to listen 

Observation and debrief refers to a way to observe and debrief the implementation of a mutually agreed upon instructional focus area. This approach is designed to celebrate effective practices and unpack the challenges of the focus area.

PROMISING PRACTICES

1

Know before you go

Before the observation, norm on what success looks like, what data will be collected, and how it will be collected.

2

Normalize feedback

Invite feedback on your practice and share how feedback has improved your instruction in the past.

3

Personalize feedback

Express gratitude and reflect on creating psychological safety while prioritizing people.

4

Be specific

Use data to include specific moments and verbatim statements in the debrief.

WHEN TO USE THIS APPROACH:



You've been working with a teacher to better understand Standard Mathematical Practice 3. You've modeled and practiced within a coaching session already, so the observation would be aligned to goals established during previous sessions through other approaches.



Teachers have just participated in a PD focused on building knowledge through vocabulary. The expectation is that they implement the learning in their classrooms in the upcoming week.

Virtual Considerations

- Join the virtual class to observe.
- Share screen to watch recorded focus areas together during the coaching session.

Research

Lewis, C., Perry, R., Hurd, J., & O'Connell, M. P. (2006). Lesson study comes of age in North America. Phi Delta Kappan, 88(4), 273-281.

Wiener, R., & Pimentel, S. (2017). Practice what you teach: Connecting curriculum & professional learning in schools. Washington, DC: Aspen Institute.

Instructional Artifact Analysis

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Instructional artifact analysis refers to examining evidence (e.g. student work, video of instruction, classroom transcript) together to build a shared understanding of growth.

PROMISING PRACTICES

1

Start with the standards

Ensure the task is standards-aligned. If not, shift to co-planning first.

2

Empathy supports understanding

Create the model artifact and unpack it to identify the criteria for success.

3

Build analytical muscles

Grow teacher leaders' ability to analyze artifacts for evidence of growth and impact.

4

Work against bias

Analyze artifacts using lenses of race, gender, and other identities for ways to better support all students' needs.

WHEN TO USE THIS APPROACH:



A teacher reports that they are implementing their learning from coaching and other PD, but student learning has not changed.



After co-planning, observing a lesson, and debriefing, you want to help a teacher examine the impact of the instruction on student understanding.



A team has set specific goals based on their equity analysis of student data and wants to look for patterns in student progress on particular types of tasks.

Virtual Consideration

Consider the range of information from a virtual environment that helps add life to an artifact: the chat log from a class, the audio clips of a breakout room discussion, screenshots of student work, etc.

Research

Blythe, T. & Allen, D. (2016). Making protocols work. Educational Leadership, 73(7).

Dunne, D. W. (2012). Teachers learn from looking together at student work. Education World.



Education, and specifically teaching, is our greatest chance to create opportunity and disrupt racial inequity in communities. Leading Educators is working toward a future where every day, every student experiences equitable teaching that affirms their inherent strengths and cultivates the knowledge they need to pursue their ambitions.

Leading Educators exists to ensure school systems have the strategy and tools to become the just and fair environments that every student deserves. We guide school systems to strengthen the conditions for adult learning such as collaboration time and quality curriculum, build enduring instructional leadership, and establish effective and engaging teaching practice. With better support and by working together, teachers can transform opportunity across schools and communities. We have a record of successful partnerships in more than 20 cities.

Too often, professional learning is disconnected from the everyday realities of instruction. That's why we work shoulder-to-shoulder with partners to define a path for systemic change, designing meaningful support around teachers, so every student excels no matter where they start. We specialize in designing professional learning that supports teachers to build deep knowledge in their content and curriculum, lead collaborative planning and practice, and equitably meet the needs of students.

Learn about our work at www.leadingeducators.org.



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