

Student-Focused Coaching

The Instructional Coach's Guide to Supporting Student Success Through Teacher Collaboration

by

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Overview of Coaching

Before reading this chapter, consider the following questions. Jot down some notes on your current understanding, and then at the end of the chapter, we will revisit these questions to assess the knowledge and insight you gained during your reading.

- How might a coach affect teacher development and student learning?
- What challenge(s) might a coach face?
- What goal(s) might you set for yourself as a coach?
- How might a campus administrator support a coach?

APPLICATION EXERCISE

List three verbs to describe the work of a coach. Then, in your own words, summarize what each verb means to you and how it will be reflected in your coaching (e.g., deliver: deliver differentiated, sustained professional development [PD] and learning targeting the needs of each teacher).

Here you are—ready to begin your learning journey into Student-Focused Coaching (SFC)! We are excited that after careful reflection during the introduction of this book, you are willing to take on this challenging, yet rewarding role. You probably have heard about coaching or maybe have direct experiences with it. Perhaps you have been coached by someone yourself, which may have been a valuable or positive experience. Some of you reading this book will already be experienced, veteran coaches. Some of you are stepping into this new role with only a vague understanding of what the coaching role entails.

We want to be clear from the start: Coaches do not just attend meetings, compile assessment data, make copies or organize materials, unpack shipments, or meet with the principal. The role of an instructional coach, if clearly defined and well executed, is hard work, and every minute counts. Successful coaching requires a great deal of planning, communicating, building relationships, working with all types of adults, and remaining positive even when facing inevitable challenges.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF COACHING?

If coaching is this hard and potentially frustrating, then why even consider it? The answer is that the rewards of being a coach are worth it. Coaching is all about helping every teacher be as successful as possible so that every student achieves success. We can all agree that teaching is hard work, and we also know that high-quality instruction can make a lifelong impact on the success of students, with demonstrated academic, social-emotional, and even economic benefits. International, evidence-based research indicates that quality teachers and teaching (Chetty et al., 2014; Jackson, 2016) that are supported by strategic teacher professional development (PD) (Rowe, 2003) are what matters most for student success.

Professional Development

Providing coaching to teachers has become a widely used and effective way to provide strategic PD to teachers and specialists in schools (Kraft et al., 2018). PD for educators can be described as specialized training, formal education, team development, and more intended to help administrators, teachers, or other educators improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness (Great Schools Partnership, 2014). PD might include taking college or university courses, participating in online webinars, attending conferences or workshops, or reading relevant resources. These options often inspire, motivate, and energize a teacher to try implementing new ideas based on this acquired knowledge. All these various PD formats can and do play a valuable role in supporting high-quality teaching; however, there is a clear downside to these traditional formats. Although PD can result in growth for the teacher, these traditional methods of providing PD are unlikely to alter the culture of an entire school or a classroom (Fullan, 2007). PD alone rarely results in sustained improved practice.

Professional Learning

Professional learning (PL) shares attributes with PD; however, PL focuses on “ownership over compliance, conversation over transmission, deep understanding over enacting rules and routines, and goal-directed activity over content coverage” (Martin et al., 2014, p. 147). PL might include reading and discussing professional literature, analyzing data with colleagues, or collaboratively planning curriculum. Teachers’ effectiveness can steadily improve with effectively designed and implemented PL because of the shared depth and understanding of their work—to improve student learning. PL coupled with PD can optimally ensure continuous learning as an individual and with colleagues. Combining professional development and learning (PDL) addresses individual student needs across the school and encourages teachers to, “keep challenging and stretching [themselves] and each other to create the maximum benefit for all students” (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016, p. 6). More details about effective PDL are provided in Chapter 10.

Professional Development and Learning and the Student-Focused Coach

What does PDL have to do with a Student-Focused coach? High-quality instructional coaching can provide the onsite, job-embedded, sustained PDL for individuals and groups that really makes a difference. Coaches have specific expertise and can assist individuals and groups of teachers to gain the knowledge and skills needed to improve instruction and student outcomes. Skillful, knowledgeable,

trained, and well-supported SFC coaches can deliver an optimal form of PDL because SFC integrates two essential components—targeted support for individuals and groups that is sustained over time (Guskey, 2003; Ingvarson et al., 2005; U.S. Agency for International Development, 2014).

The PDL provided by SFC coaches has these characteristics:

- Content is based on evidence- and research-based best practices.
- Coaching efforts focus on student learning.
- Teachers have a voice in the development of PDL.
- PDL is collaborative, experiential, interactive, and engaging.
- Opportunities exist for reflection and inquiry.
- Content connects to the educators’ day-to-day work with students, as well as to a larger plan for school improvement.

REFLECTION

What do you think about the list of characteristics of effective PDL? Reflect on each. Are there other things you would add to this list?

Write down ways in which you have attempted to enhance and improve your own professional practice. Did any result in positive and sustained changes in your classroom that resulted in improved student outcomes? Why or why not?

WHAT IS INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING?

Providing effective, strategic PDL to teachers that ultimately results in improved student outcomes is the overarching purpose of coaching. What should this strategic PDL actually look like when implemented in real-world school settings?

If we stopped some average people on the street and asked them if they had ever heard of someone who works in schools who is called a coach, we are guessing most people would say, “Sure! Basketball coaches, right? Or football coaches?” Or gymnastics, baseball, or even cheerleading. It would not surprise any of us to hear this response. Few people outside of schools have heard about the role of the academic coach—even though it has been a role in some schools for at least a few decades. If we went on to ask these same people to speculate about what someone who is called an instructional coach might do in schools, then they would likely suggest that these coaches watch teachers teaching lessons and give the teachers feedback, or they might hypothesize that coaches provide guidance and support to other teachers to help them provide the best possible instruction to students. And, of course, they would be right. This description seems like a common sense, practical view of the role of an instructional coach. As the coaching role has grown and expanded, however, we should recognize that there are other things that coaches are frequently asked to do with their time.

In fact, the number and types of tasks that coaches perform vary greatly (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Deussen et al., 2007; Kraft et al., 2018; Scott et al., 2012). Although the fundamental purpose of instructional coaching should

always be related in some way to PDL, several different approaches to coaching have been implemented in schools. We describe four of these approaches, or models, of coaching. As you read, think about the pros and cons of each if they were implemented in your real-world setting.

Four Models of Coaching

The four models of coaching discussed here are technical coaching, problem-solving coaching, reflective practice coaching, and peer coaching. We certainly recognize that this list is not exhaustive or complete. We are not recommending, or discouraging the use of, any of these models of coaching. We simply have observed these four different processes being used in schools to provide coaching services.

Technical Coaching The primary function of the coach in the technical coaching model is to assist teachers in the accurate and high-quality implementation of a specific program or strategy (American Institutes for Research, 2004). Technical coaching is often used to support and extend training that has been previously provided to teachers in seminars or workshops. The relationship between the technical coach and the teacher is that of an expert and a novice.

For example, a school might adopt a new math curriculum or a new computer-assisted intervention program and hire coaches to provide support for teachers using these new materials. These technical coaches receive significant training to become highly knowledgeable about those materials or strategies. Their coaching is focused on helping their colleagues successfully implement them. Technical coaches can play an important and valuable role in achieving successful outcomes when educators use well-designed, research-supported materials with fidelity.

REFLECTION

Write down possible pros and cons of the technical coaching model.

Problem-Solving Coaching Problem-solving coaching involves having the coach work with one or more colleagues to address specific concerns such as, “Malique is struggling with phonics,” “Rory isn’t making progress because he is so often off-task during our instructional time,” or “There are a bunch of students in my fourth-period science class that can’t write a report without a lot of help from me.” Problem-solving coaching can address issues or concerns related to a single student, a small group of students, or even an entire class.

The basis for the problem-solving model of coaching in schools comes primarily from research that was conducted in the fields of school psychology and special education. Practitioners in both professions are frequently called on to collaborate with or advise colleagues about the academic, behavioral, and/or social-emotional concerns of a student. The process—typically called *consultation* in the research literature—has been studied since the 1970s as a triadic (three participants), indirect service delivery model in which a consultant (e.g., special educator, school psychologist, reading specialist) works with and through a consultee (often a general education classroom teacher or parent) to improve the outcomes of a client (usually a student with some learning, behavioral, or emotional

challenges). Sometimes consultation can be collaborative; the consultant and the consultee pool their respective knowledge and skills to jointly attempt to solve the concern. Or, consultation can be more prescriptive, in which the consultant provides expert guidance to direct the resolution of the problem. The process has been studied extensively by researchers (Erchul & Sheridan, 2008; Idol et al., 1995; Kampwirth & Powers, 2016). The process of school-based consultation mirrors much of the work of coaches (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009).

REFLECTION

Write down the possible pros and cons of the problem-solving coaching model.

Reflective Practice Coaching When the primary function of a coach is to help teachers become more aware of thought processes surrounding their own instructional decision making, the coach is likely using strategies from the reflective practice model of coaching. Cognitive Coaching, developed by Costa and Garmston (1993) in the 1980s, is probably the most widely implemented version of this model. In this model, coaches receive extensive formal training in the cognitive coaching strategy, in which the coach serves as a mediator who initially works to establish rapport with the person being coached. The person receiving coaching is viewed as a trustworthy colleague, not someone who needs to change or be fixed in some way. The coach observes a teacher delivering a lesson and then meets, sometimes in a series of meetings, to encourage the teacher to reflect on the quality of their teaching. Having teachers keep a journal of their reflections is encouraged.

REFLECTION

Write down possible pros and cons of the reflective practice coaching model.

Peer Coaching Peer coaching is likely the best known of all coaching models. Many acknowledge Beverley Showers and Bruce Joyce as the originators of the term *peer coaching*. These researchers started to look at coaching in the 1970s, exploring the hypothesis that schools could improve, and students benefit, if teachers provided each other with on-site guidance, support, and feedback. Their peer coaching process started by having teachers attend weekly seminars to study the teaching process. These seminars were followed up by encouraging teachers to watch each other teach and then discuss and share their ideas and reflections.

In 1996, after nearly 20 years of research on this process, Showers and Joyce reflected on what they had learned. A key conclusion they reached was that teachers should not provide verbal feedback to each other. Showers and Joyce's research clearly showed that when teachers used technical feedback techniques following an observation, it was difficult to prevent coaching from slipping into something that looked and felt like supervision, and the collaborative activity among the participating teachers was impaired rather than enhanced. Showers and Joyce continued to recommend that teachers have the opportunity to watch each other teach; however,

they suggested that the debriefing after the observation should not include feedback. Rather, the observing teacher should simply comment on what they learned and how they might use what they learned in their own classroom. These researchers also found that a key to effective coaching involves teachers collaboratively planning lessons and developing support materials and instructional activities.

REFLECTION

Write down the possible pros and cons of the peer coaching model.

What are your thoughts on the recommendation that coaches not provide verbal feedback following an observation?

After reading about these four coaching models, which most closely resembles the coaching you have seen provided in schools?

HOW STUDENT-FOCUSED COACHING CAME TO BE

We asked you to identify possible pros and cons for each of the four models of instructional coaching presented in this chapter. Each model clearly has some positive aspects that would benefit teachers. SFC has evolved since the 1990s and combines elements of all four of the previously discussed models. SFC is very much rooted in the real world and based on real-world needs.

Jan Hasbrouck suddenly became a reading coach with no guidance, support, or training—likely a situation with which many of you can relate. In 1985, Jan was asked to leave her position as a reading specialist, her job for the past 15 years, and take on a new role that was vaguely described to her as “someone who would work with the other reading specialists in the district to help them . . . well, you know. Help them!” Her new role started the following Monday, and it soon became evident to Jan that 1) this role was completely different from teaching struggling readers and 2) she did not really know where to start or how to be helpful to her colleagues. She knew she needed help.

Jan learned that there were courses being offered to graduate students in education at the University of Oregon on school consultation. *School-based consultation* is generically described as a process involving a consultant (typically a special educator or school psychologist) and teachers as an effort to promote success in students who are struggling. The process is voluntary, and the consultant serves as a resource for ideas and suggestions rather than the provider of a solution. All participants are considered equally valuable and necessary in the process. There was a shared sense of ownership of the problem, the goals for the student, and the intervention developed to achieve the goals, which results in a greater likelihood of the teacher making changes to their practice. The personalized and sustained guided support provided by the consultant during the intervention implementation helps ensure that new skills can be adequately learned and used again in future situations (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Erchel & Sheridan, 2014). Consultation has been extensively studied and found to be effective in not only successfully addressing the targeted concern of the client (the student) but also strengthening the skills of the teacher and thereby preventing similar problems in the future (Sheridan & Cowan, 2004).

The consultation courses Jan took proved to be very valuable and insightful to her, and she soon entered the doctoral program at the University of Oregon to study the consultation process more in depth. While there, she worked with her colleagues to develop the initial version of SFC, a process they originally called *Responsive Consultation* (RC; Hasbrouck, 1991; Hasbrouck & Garrison, 1990). The RC model drew heavily on the problem-solving strategies often used in educational consultation as an effective way to both improve student's outcomes (behavioral, academic, social-emotional) and, in the process, strengthen the knowledge and skill set of the consultee (teacher). The RC model continued to evolve and develop. It was later used in research conducted at Texas A&M University (cf. Hughes et al., 2001) in a process called *Responsive Systems Consultation* (RCS).

Around this same time, Jan, in collaboration with Carolyn Denton, began to think about how the RC/RCS model could work as a process to provide coaching to teachers. Jan and Carolyn incorporated research on peer coaching and effective PD strategies (Gulamhussein, 2013) into the original RC/RCS model, along with strategies from technical coaching. The model was now called SFC and continues to evolve and improve with the insight and expertise of Daryl Michel.

STUDENT-FOCUSED COACHING

In the Introduction, we defined *SFC* as a cooperative, ideally collaborative, professional relationship with colleagues mutually engaged in efforts that help maximize every teacher's knowledge and skills to enhance student learning. We described a few of these words and phrases in the Introduction and now want to dig a bit deeper into this definition. There are a lot of important words included here, and all are essential to understanding *SFC*.

We start with the last four words of the definition because this is the focus of our work: *to enhance student learning*. As you perhaps have experienced or can already see based on what you have read so far, coaching can sometimes seem quite complex and even intimidating to provide (and at times unpleasant to receive). Coaching can sometimes feel awkward and uncomfortable when, for example, you are coaching a veteran teacher, perhaps one who has more experience than you. Another challenge coaches face is working with colleagues who have a different philosophy about teaching or a negative attitude about some of their students or the families of those students. You will find that not every teacher is eager to work with you in your coaching role. At these times, it helps to keep in mind that coaching is not about you, and it is not about your colleagues.

Bottom line, coaching is about the students.

Sure, the coach works directly with teachers to help them implement effective instruction, but the only reason coaches care about making that happen is because coaching ultimately benefits students. We have found that keeping students' needs at the heart of your coaching can help you during those inevitable moments of discomfort or awkwardness to refocus onto that essential purpose of *SFC*—coaching is about the kids.

Professional relationship is another key phrase in our definition of *SFC*. Coaching cannot occur outside of some kind of professional relationship. When you work with other teachers as a coach, you may have the opportunity to work with someone who is, or who may become, a personal friend. More often, you may be working with a peer colleague (or administrator/supervisor) you barely know. At times—we hope they are rare—you may even find yourself working with a person with whom

you have a tense, uncomfortable relationship. When these awkward, uncomfortable moments happen, take a deep breath and remember that coaching is about the students and not about making friends or having a good time with a fellow teacher. All of us who have taken on a coaching role sometimes need to find a way to get past our own personal discomfort and resolve to complete the hard work despite differences. In Chapter 4, we discuss communication and relationship-building skills and provide specific suggestions and strategies for how to start and maintain professional relationships and deal with those inevitable challenging moments.

Coaching must be based on a relationship that is, at minimum, cooperative. This is a key point: You cannot provide coaching services to someone who does not want to cooperate with you. Coaching is simply not possible in those situations. If working with a coach is not a voluntary process, then it becomes something more like supervision than coaching. Ideally, by engaging in effective SFC coaching with a colleague, you can help change a minimally cooperative relationship into one that is at some point fully collaborative, in which you and your colleague are equally involved; equally trusting; equally respectful of each other's skills, knowledge, and experience; and equally committed to helping students. The powerful outcomes of collaboration are realized by first engaging in a cooperative process, with participants mutually engaged and mutually focused on helping students. We often talk about starting with a small spark of cooperation that can ultimately build into a roaring bonfire of collaboration. In Chapters 6 and 7, you will learn about the SFC Collaborative Problem-Solving Process that has been specifically developed to help build a collaborative professional relationship while also addressing students' needs and building skills and confidence in teachers.

When the SFC definition refers to *mutually engaged*, we are underscoring the fact that the SFC process is not directive or top-down, with the coach trying to fix the teacher or make teachers do anything. In fact, we often remind our SFC coaches of this reality: Coaches have no power and no authority. That statement is often met with both concern and relief. What we mean by this phrase is that coaches are no more powerful than their peer colleagues; they are teachers, not administrators, who are working in a different role. Instead of providing direct services to students, coaches partner with teachers to assist them with providing the best possible instruction and support to every student.

REFLECTION

There are three roles in which SFC coaches should engage: Facilitator, Collaborative Problem-Solver, and Teacher/Learner. When you think about each role, what do you picture yourself doing as an SFC coach? Write these ideas down and make any adjustments as you learn more about each role.

The Facilitator Role for SFC Coaches

SFC coaches are engaged in the Facilitator role when they

- Support effective, skillful teachers to continue to be successful
- Spend time building the all-important professional relationships that can get the coaching process started

- Help lead their school, district, or agency toward a commitment to the success of all students by supporting the successful implementation of systems of support, such as leadership teams

It is a legitimate use of some of an SFC coach's time to assist busy teachers with logistics (e.g., finding a missing workbook to accompany a lesson, tracking down assessment materials, helping with data entry or analysis, following up on a parent's request, locating an online patch for a software glitch). These efforts can be enormously valuable to a busy and hard-working teacher. Because coaching is an indirect service delivery model based on a collaborative professional relationship, the Facilitator role also covers the time a coach devotes to developing those relationships as well as working with administrators/supervisors and colleagues to help define the role of the coach.

Effective schools often use leadership teams to help harness the collective knowledge and wisdom embedded within their communities (Louis et al., 2010). Shared decision making about things such as school schedules, PDL, and resource allocation—both human and material—can have a positive impact on the outcomes of achievement and the overall feeling of trust within school climates (Montgomery et al., 2013). An SFC coach, in their role as Facilitator, can and should spend time supporting the successful implementation of systems of support, including leadership teams.

As vital as these tasks of the Facilitator role are, it is important that a coach not spend too much time in this role. Too much time spent doing these kinds of helpful tasks, as appreciated as they are, can turn the coach into an assistant or quasi-administrator and minimize the impact of coaching for teachers and, therefore, students. When engaged in the Facilitator role, the coach is not directly involved in providing PDL, which is the coach's primary purpose. We discuss the Facilitator role more fully in Chapter 3. There are two other valuable ways SFC coaches spend their time providing differentiated, sustained PDL.

The Collaborative Problem-Solver Role for SFC Coaches

The role in which we hope that SFC coaches will spend most of their time is the Collaborative Problem-Solver role in which an SFC coach employs the systematic, structured process called *SFC Collaborative Problem Solving* to work with teachers to address problems in the classroom that may be keeping students from making adequate gains. In this process, the coach leads the teacher—or a group of teachers—through a step-by-step process to carefully examine the issues related to the identified problem, collect and analyze relevant information to focus their efforts, develop goals, and come up with a targeted action plan (TAP). The TAP is then implemented by the teacher(s), with the coach providing support and guidance as needed. The effects of the TAP are evaluated, and next steps are determined.

The function of a coach in SFC Collaborative Problem Solving is to manage the process effectively and efficiently, but creating the TAP is a truly collaborative effort. Chapters 6 and 7 in this book describe the process in detail, and other chapters provide guidance on carrying out the process effectively and efficiently (see Chapters 8 and 9). We hope that the Collaborative Problem-Solver role will be the primary focus of SFC coaches' efforts because we have learned that there

are three powerful and important outcomes of engaging in the SFC Collaborative Problem-Solving process:

1. It is an effective way to provide targeted and sustained PDL support to teachers.
2. It has the possibility of actually solving classroom-based problems that can result in improved outcomes for students (which is always our goal).
3. Participating in this process—when conducted effectively and efficiently—is the best way to build essential professional collaborative relationships.

The Teacher/Learner Role for SFC Coaches

The third role for SFC coaches is to provide more traditional PDL support to their teacher colleagues by sharing effective, proven strategies and supporting their successful implementation in the classroom. We have labeled this role Teacher/Learner because we have found that the outcomes of coaching are significantly enhanced by presenting and maintaining the role of the SFC coach as a true peer colleague of teachers. Just the notion that coaches are there to provide PDL to their colleagues can imply so much that is incorrect—the coach is somehow smarter or more skilled than the other teachers, the coach has some mystical wisdom to bestow on the colleagues who are “just” classroom teachers, or the coach does in fact have some level of power and authority beyond that of teacher. The coaching role can imply a top-down, one-sided, expert/novice relationship that does not feel very equal or collaborative.

Certainly, taking on the role of the coach does not confer any kind of special power, nor does it come with a magic wand to solve every classroom problem—as much as we sometimes wish it did. The best and most effective coaches know that along with effectively providing differentiated, sustained PDL support as needed to their colleagues—teaching them better ways to help students—they must also remain grounded in their role as learners. Coaches have a responsibility to keep themselves well informed about the findings from high-quality, well-designed research and resulting best practice strategies. (Chapter 11 of this book is an overview of the research that a coach should know about effective instruction). Subsequently, coaches have a responsibility to help bring those ideas and strategies into full and successful implementation in their colleagues’ classrooms.

The Teacher/Learner role comprises all those activities that involve planning and directly providing differentiated, sustained, and appropriately targeted PDL opportunities for teachers. This can include having the coach identify an article, book, or blog that is relevant to classroom instruction and organizing a study group or using a professional learning community (PLC) format for teachers to examine and learn from those materials. Presenting workshops or seminars focused on an issue or concern for which a group of teachers would like to have more information and resources (e.g., supporting struggling readers in content classes, learning to identify dyslexia and providing supports for students with dyslexia across the grades, offering resources to support and extend learning with a new math or science curriculum) would fall under the Teacher/Learner role. Such workshops or seminars could also be designed to target an area of concern that has been identified by the administrator/supervisor from examining assessment scores or other data sources. Coaches are also engaged in the Teacher/Learner role when they participate—alone or with one or more colleagues—in their own PDL, such as by reading current research on instructional best practices or attending

webinars, workshops, or conferences. It is a professional responsibility of a coach to keep themselves well-informed and up to date on the information they are expected to share with their colleagues.

The Teacher/Learner role also includes those times when teachers request a coach to visit their classrooms, observe them teaching a lesson, and provide feedback. If you think this sounds like the peer coaching process that Showers and Joyce studied extensively and found to be ineffective, then you would be correct because it is definitely like that process of observing and providing feedback. The key difference here is the teachers requested that the coach observe them and provide constructive feedback. Coaches should always be open and prepared to offer this kind of valuable service. We discuss this process in more detail and provide some ideas for how to do this work in Chapter 10.

Other Roles for SFC Coaches

As we continue to note, we, like you, work in the real world. We are highly aware that no coach ever spends all their time engaged only in these three roles in school settings. Coaches—whether following the SFC model or not—are frequently asked to engage in other tasks that include administrative and managerial activities. Coaches may need to attend meetings; review or evaluate instructional materials; communicate with others via mail, e-mail, texts, or telephone; order and manage curriculum materials; and spend time completing forms, paperwork, and reports. Some coaches may also provide supervision to a paraprofessional or instructional assistant, student teacher, or volunteer. They may be asked to monitor students on the playground, in bus loading areas, in hallways, or in the cafeteria or auditorium. At times, a coach may need to serve as a substitute for a classroom teacher. Some coaches are also involved in directly teaching students on a regular schedule.

From time to time, every coach will need to perform some of these and numerous other additional tasks. This is part of the reality of working in a school setting. Engaging in these tasks—especially those that involve engaging with students—can be beneficial if they help teachers view the coach as one of them. We consider all these tasks to be outside of the coaching role, however, so any amount of time spent doing these tasks takes away from the limited time available for actual coaching. For optimal outcomes, keep your focus on the tasks involved in the roles of Facilitator, Collaborative Problem-Solver, and Teacher/Learner.

It is common that coaches are also asked to take on a role that borders on supervising teachers. Based on the research conducted on consultation and peer coaching, we strongly suggest that coaches never engage in supervision or contribute in any way to the formal evaluation of teachers. It is important for the success of coaching that coaches be aligned with teachers rather than administrators. Teachers must trust that coaches are their peers and their partners in helping students succeed. If teachers believe or even suspect that a coach is evaluating the quality of their teaching, and perhaps sharing that information with the principal, then those teachers will be much less likely to want to work with the coach. We understand that different field-based settings may take a different stance than we do; however, we must stress our firsthand experiences in multiple settings across the country. Circumstances in which a coach is seen as an evaluator almost always lead to a lack of trust and a strained professional relationship. We have learned, however, when an SFC coach is able to commit to a well-defined set of responsibilities, relationships with teachers flourish, trust is established, and the coach is readily available to provide differentiated, sustained PDL.

Unfortunately, many coaches are required to provide coaching as a top-down process in which coaches lead (sometimes unwilling) teachers to adopt a new set of practices to use in their classrooms, frequently using a coaching cycle (coaches observe a lesson after a preconference, followed by a postobservation conference) “repeated several times as the teacher advances toward mastery” (Gulamhussein, 2013, p. 37). This coaching cycle was adopted with little-to-no modification from the identical three-step process of clinical supervision used in teacher evaluations since the late 1970s (Littrell et al., 1979). The widely used coaching cycle is a reason many teachers feel that coaches are supervising or evaluating them, rather than providing valuable and relevant support. Teachers feel they are being supervised because they are being coached using a supervisory process. Again, SFC coaches can certainly use a coaching cycle process in the Teacher/Learner role if the teacher requests it. In Chapter 2, “Getting Started as an SFC Coach,” we discuss more ideas about how to separate coaching from supervision. Chapter 5, “Managing Time,” provides a tool for you to use to help monitor how you are spending your time across the three roles of SFC, including all the other tasks coaches are asked to do. Armed with that information, you can help focus your work appropriately: To engage in efforts that support teacher development to enhance student learning.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD COACH

Having read about what instructional coaching is and its purpose, we should spend a bit of time discussing an important question: “Who makes a good coach?”

REFLECTION

Before proceeding, write down your response to the question, “Who makes a good coach?” Include skills and knowledge that you believe a coach should possess.

Effective instructional coaching requires many skills and a wide breadth of knowledge. Skills such as communication, time management, problem solving, and goal setting; knowledge of educational research and how to translate it to educational practice; and how to design and implement effective instruction and PDL opportunities can be learned. Our hope is that this book will help you strengthen some of your skills and knowledge in these specific areas.

In addition, most people who become instructional coaches should also bring a certain level of teaching experience to the table. Research has not identified a minimum (or maximum) number of years’ experience that a teacher should have before considering taking on a coaching role. Common sense would suggest that having some level of teaching experience would be valuable for a prospective instructional coach, both to build up your self-confidence and expand your professional toolkit of strategies and experiences. A coach should be someone who becomes better at their professional craft over the years; we all hope that our 10th year of teaching is better than our first year of teaching.

Other aspects of being a coach are less tangible, however, and may include skills that would be considered more like innate personality traits and a working style that are less amenable to change. These may be characteristics that anyone

who is considering taking on the role of instructional coach needs to possess before receiving training. These characteristics could include, but are not limited to, being comfortable and enjoying working collaboratively with other adults, possessing empathy, being resourceful and resilient, persevering through challenges, and being self-aware. The ability to forgive easily—both yourself and others—is helpful. And having a good sense of humor is always a plus.

GOALS FOR STUDENT-FOCUSED COACHING

This book is designed to help you develop or deepen your skills as a coach so that you may work confidently and effectively to build professional relationships with colleagues and help them work successfully with every student. As you engage in these challenging and important efforts, we encourage you to stay focused on four broad goals that are aligned with our definition of the SFC model.

Goal 1: Enhance Student Learning

Although coaching can be a powerful way to provide effective PDL support to teachers, the SFC model always focuses on the needs of students. SFC coaches work to help teachers, parents, and everyone in the system use the best possible strategies and support to help every student successfully achieve their academic, behavioral, and social-emotional potential. That is the number one goal of our work. (*Note:* Throughout this book, we use the term *family engagement* [Mapp, 2016] to describe the involvement of family or families that include any adult caregiver [e.g., biological parents, foster parents, grandparents, siblings] who takes care of children.)

Goal 2: Maximize Every Teacher’s Knowledge and Skills

SFC coaches understand that the purpose of coaching is to provide PDL support to their teacher colleagues. SFC coaches know that coaching can be provided through three different roles: Facilitator, Collaborative Problem-Solver, and Teacher/Learner. Each coaching encounter is unique. The SFC coach uses the three SFC roles as appropriate to respond to the unique needs of each colleague at that moment and helps their colleague provide the most effective instruction and support to their students and those with whom they will work in the future.

Goal 3: Learn From Each Other

The SFC model of coaching is based on a process that requires at least minimal cooperation and hopefully becomes a truly collaborative partnership. SFC coaches are responsible for sharing what they know and continuing to learn with their colleagues to help teachers provide the best possible instructional support to all their students and strive to achieve Goal 1: enhance student learning. We want our teacher colleagues to learn from us, but SFC coaches know that the most effective coaching is not a process that moves only in one direction. The most successful SFC coaches accept the fact that they do not know everything (no one ever does) and do not see themselves as responsible for fixing every classroom problem. Successful SFC coaches are always open to learning from and alongside their colleagues. The focus of SFC is not the coach or the teacher. The focus is how we can help students and become even better at our own important work.

Goal 4: Prevent Future Problems

A coach can do far more than simply help a teacher improve a single student's learning. A coach can help build teachers' understanding, knowledge, skills, competence, and confidence so they will be better prepared to handle similar concerns in the future. At the school level, a coach can also help identify and address broader concerns such as a group of teachers who may need PDL in a specific area, students from one grade level who are showing academic concerns that could have been addressed in previous grades, or gaps in curriculum materials that should be considered to reduce and/or prevent problems.

THE ESSENTIAL PARTNER TO SFC COACHES: THE ADMINISTRATOR

We would be remiss in ending this chapter describing the work of the SFC coach without discussing the role of the administrator/supervisor, who is the essential partner to successful coaching. The role of an instructional coach is implemented in schools in different ways, some more successful than others. It sometimes seems like trying to establish the role of an onsite PDL specialist can be compared with building an airplane while it is in flight. Coaches cannot work alone—the very nature of their job requires collaboration with peer colleagues and support from their administrator/supervisor, often a principal. It is essential for administrators/supervisors who work with coaches to take the time to learn as much as possible about this exciting and challenging role. Chapter 12, “Working With Administrative Partners,” is devoted to this essential partnership.

COACHING IN THE REAL WORLD

We want to assure you once again that we work in real-world settings and understand that you do too. Schools are complex and challenging environments. Most teachers and administrators/supervisors are aware of students who come to school with little preparation for learning, live in highly stressful situations at home, or have negative attitudes about their own abilities to be successful. These realities are sometimes made worse by inadequate instructional materials, lack of support for high-quality PDL efforts, philosophical differences about how students should be taught, and more.

We want to begin our work together by acknowledging these realities with these wise words, “It goes without saying that there never was, isn't now, and never will be enough time, money or trained personnel to do the hard work that schools have undertaken” (Kroth & Edge, 2007, p. vii). At first glance, this might sound like a statement of surrender—the job of teaching students is a lost cause without enough time, money, or help. Yet, the message of Kroth and Edge that we take to heart is this: We simply cannot use the lack of these resources as excuses, or we will become too discouraged to keep on trying to meet the needs of all of our students. We accept these realities and proceed with our work despite them. We cannot give up. Our job is critically important: To maximize every teacher's knowledge and skills to enhance student learning.

CONCLUSION

The role of the Student-Focused coach can be challenging, but it can also be an effective way to help provide teachers with the guidance and support they need and deserve to meet the needs of every student in their classes. The SFC model was developed from an extensive research base and has been successfully used in school settings for many years. Using the three roles of SFC coaches—Facilitator, Collaborative Problem-Solver, and Teacher/Learner—allows us to provide differentiated and effective coaching to every colleague. Adhering to this model can help ensure success for coaches in every school setting, and the remaining chapters provide a range of tools and strategies to help make coaching a success.

Before proceeding to the next chapter, complete the form in Appendix 1.1 to assess your current understanding of the SFC model. Also, revisit your responses to the questions at the start of this chapter and make any adjustments based on new knowledge or insights gleaned, and take time to make any changes or updates to the application exercise.

VIRTUAL COACHING TIP



How can we make a difference for each student's academic, behavioral, and/or social-emotional potential? This question should be addressed as we provide either face-to-face or virtual instruction. Plan ahead so that you and your colleagues are prepared for the conversation by asking them to collect and be prepared to share relevant data on students' academic performance and behavioral concerns, along with anecdotal information about students social-emotional status, including concerns about their home or family situation. Take advantage of the virtual platform features to take notes, share documents, record your conversation, and so forth.

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APPENDIX 1.1

Self-Assessment Checklist for SFC Coaches

Name: _____

Date: _____

Please self-assess on the following statements by marking an X in the appropriate box.

1 = not at all 2 = somewhat 3 = quite a bit 4 = fully

		1	2	3	4
1	I understand the PURPOSE of instructional coaching and can accurately DESCRIBE it to others.				
2	I understand the Student-Focused Coaching (SFC) MODEL and can accurately DESCRIBE it to others.				
3	I understand the three ROLES in which SFC coaches engage—Facilitator, Collaborative Problem-Solver, Teacher/Learner.				
4	I understand my ROLE as an SFC coach and recognize the limitations of the role. I can accurately and concisely DESCRIBE my role as an SFC coach to others.				
5	I ENGAGE in all three ROLES in of SFC coaching: Facilitator, Collaborative Problem-Solver, Teacher/Learner as appropriate.				
6	I understand and work to achieve the four GOALS of SFC coaching: 1) enhance student learning, 2) maximize every teacher's skill and knowledge, 3) learn from each other, and 4) prevent future problems.				
7	I work to establish and maintain an effective PARTNERSHIP with my principal(s) and/or supervisor(s).				
8	I have strategies for ENROLLING colleagues into the coaching process.				
9	I make regular CONTACT with ALL my colleagues (using facilitator questions).				
10	I understand and use specific strategies to help establish and maintain trusting PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS with all types of colleagues.				
11	I can effectively DIFFERENTIATE coaching based on the needs/desires of my colleagues.				
12	I can plan and deliver effective professional development and learning SERVICES in multiple formats (one to one, small group, large group).				
13	I respect and protect the CONFIDENTIALITY of the coaching/colleague relationship.				
14	I have good verbal and nonverbal COMMUNICATION SKILLS. I can USE these skills proficiently in situations that are tense, high stakes, and/or unclear.				
15	I can skillfully make respectful, ASSERTIVE REQUESTS of colleagues ("Solution Sandwich").				
16	I understand and can use the SYSTEMATIC PROBLEM-SOLVING STRATEGY for collaborative planning effectively and efficiently.				

APPENDIX 1.1

17	I understand and can effectively use the systematic TEAM PROBLEM-SOLVING strategy.				
18	I can accurately document and effectively manage my professional TIME as an SFC coach.				
19	I can assist a building/department to FOCUS on coaching/professional development efforts using multiple sources of data.				
20	I continue to extend and deepen my own professional KNOWLEDGE BASE.				

NOTES/COMMENTS:

Awidely used, highly effective approach to student success, Student-Focused Coaching (SFC) helps instructional coaches and teachers work collaboratively to improve student outcomes using evidence-based practices. This is your one-stop, step-by-step guide to instructional coaching in K–12 schools using the field-tested, research-based SFC model.

Featuring a foreword by Jim Knight, the leading voice on instructional coaching, this book was coauthored by the lead developer of the SFC model (Jan Hasbrouck) and an experienced instructional coach and trainer (Daryl Michel). These expert authors help you master the three key roles of coaching: **Facilitator**, **Collaborative Problem-Solver**, and **Teacher/Learner**. You'll discover how to build respectful and mutually beneficial professional relationships with *every* teacher—from the most eager to the most reluctant—and work together to help all students learn and thrive.

LEARN HOW TO

- **Partner with teachers** to tackle academic, behavioral, and social-emotional challenges
- **Hone your collaborative communication skills**
- **Work with teachers to set and achieve goals** by selecting and implementing evidence-based interventions
- **Help teachers support struggling students** with goal-based, targeted, and intensive instruction
- **Improve time management skills** using a four-step, systematic problem-solving process
- **Collect different types of data** and use it to give feedback to the teachers you work with
- **Design continuous professional learning opportunities** that meet individual teacher needs
- **Deliver support to administrators** to make the most of the benefits coaches provide

“Practical, reflective, and with razor-sharp focus on student outcomes, Hasbrouck and Michel weave just the right amount of research and theory into this easy-to-access, indispensable coaching resource. A must-read for coaches and the administrators who support them.”

—Carol Tolman, Ed.D.,
drcaroltolman.com, coauthor with
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