

Introduction to Coaching

Coaching uses techniques such as reflection, analysis, and problem solving to assist teachers in studying their own teaching practices. Coaching assists teachers in expanding their teaching expertise; in the case of the new teacher, it eases the transition from novice to experienced teacher. This non-evaluative approach enables the coach to act as a confidant to the new teacher. It is out of trust that a willingness to grow and to change is born.

Coaching is an on-going process that guides teachers in broadening their instructional repertoires. While there are several different models of coaching, all of them emphasize an ongoing process that assists teachers in acquiring and applying new skills and effective teaching strategies. One of the mentor's major roles is that of coach. Coaching can encompass several models or approaches.

Coaching Models

- **Cognitive Coaching**

This coaching model as conceived by Arthur Costa and Robert Garmston is a supervisory model. It was originally used by supervisors with teachers. Intended to enhance instructional decision making, it is similar to various clinical supervision processes.

- **Peer Coaching**

Peer coaching is used among teachers to collaborate on various instructional and professional issues. It focuses on professional development. Peer coaching involves professional colleagues working together to reflect on instructional problems, to build new skills, and to attain insights on current practices. Peer coaching is different from cognitive coaching models in that it focuses on peer assistance, not supervision.

- **Collegial Coaching**

This model is similar to the peer model, but it focuses on the reflective processes of the relationships between teaching and learning. The primary emphasis in the collegial model is on refining teaching through reflection and collaboration with other teachers.

- **Technical Coaching**

As defined by Nielson, this model of coaching emphasizes a five-stage process: a preobservation conference, an observation and data collection, an analysis and strategy session, a feedback conference, and a postconference analysis.

- **The Louisiana Model**

The coaching model used in the Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program is called focused coaching because the coach and new teacher focus their discussions and activities on the Louisiana Components of Effective Teaching. The Components of Effective Teaching provide the operational framework for coaching and broader mentoring processes. The coaching process envisioned for the Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program is not a supervisory one, but a collegial or peer approach. An experienced teacher serving as coach helps the new teacher understand the Components of Effective Teaching and helps him/her analyze classroom performances and practices in relation to those Components. This is not to say that the coach uses only the Components, instruments, and procedures used in the teacher assessment as vehicles for helping the new teacher. There are several approaches to conferencing, observation, and postobservation debriefing that a mentor may want to employ in assisting and enhancing a new teacher's growth.

The Focused Coaching Process



Focused Coaching allows new teachers to . . .

- reduce their feelings of isolation,
- structure their own professional development around the Components of Effective Teaching,
- improve their current instructional practices within the Components,
- implement new strategies,
- act as educational researchers in the classroom,
- reduce their feelings of anxiety about the teacher assessment process.

Focused Coaching suppositions are. . .



- The Components of Effective Teaching and the teacher assessment process and instruments are referents.
- Teaching behavior within the Components is analyzed.
- Instructional practices are based on the teacher's decisions.
- Goal-oriented behavior fosters instructional improvement.
- Instructional improvement thrives on objective reporting of teaching behavior.
- Teachers refine their instructional leadership abilities by participating in the coaching process.
- Instructional improvement requires time and effort.
- Teacher collaboration encourages and enhances growth in instructional practices.
- Coaching is a confidential process.

The Coaching Process

The coaching process is a method of professional development that promotes teachers' professional growth through practice, observation, reflection, and collaboration with colleagues. This method of professional development has four stages:

1. **planning,**
2. **observation/teaching performance,**
3. **reflection,**
4. **debriefing.**

Coaching Stages

In all models of coaching, there are generally four stages to the coaching process: the planning conference, the observation, reflection time, and the debriefing conference.

These are described briefly below and are discussed in more detail later in this handbook.

● Planning Conference

In the planning conference, the teacher and the coach create a clear visualization of the intended lesson. This activity is a “mental dress rehearsal” of the teaching performance. The coach helps the teacher to “fine tune” the image of the lesson by asking open-ended questions about the teacher’s expectations of the students’ desired behaviors and the planned instructional strategies.

The purposes of the questions are to clarify the content and strategies that the teacher intends to use during the lesson, to formulate a picture of what the students will be doing during the lesson, and to reconstruct mentally the teacher’s thinking about the decisions he/she has made.

The questions are not intended to create a new and different lesson plan. They are designed to assist the teacher in mentally viewing the lesson and to examine the decisions the teacher made in planning.

“It gives you a secure feeling to have someone there for you—someone to lean on, someone who’s such a good resource. You know you’re not alone.”

Phyllis Young, *Beginning Teacher*

During the planning conference, the teacher and mentor or mentor support team member select a focus for the observation, the method of data collection, and the time for the observation.

● Observation/Teaching Performance

During the observation, the coach records objective, observable data on student and teacher behaviors relevant to the predetermined focus.

“We began to exchange lesson plans and reading materials. Now we observe each other whenever we use a new approach or special activity.”

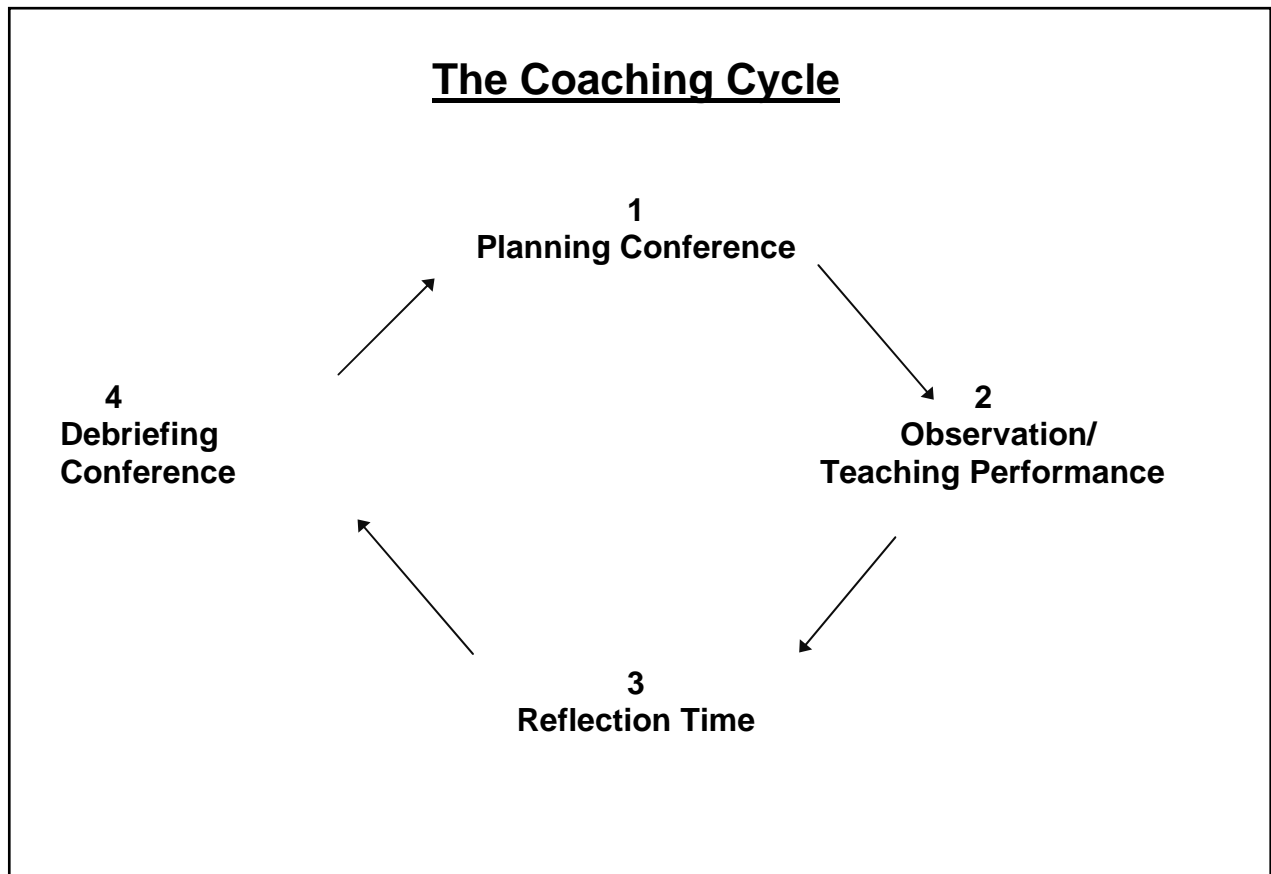
Veteran Teacher, *The Mentor Teacher Casebook*

● Reflection Time

Following the observation/teaching performance, time is allowed (usually a day or two) for reflection. The reflection time allows the teacher and the coach to think back about the planned lesson, the observed lesson, and the discrepancies, if any, between the two. This reflection time prepares the coach and the teacher for an in-depth discussion of the lesson in the debriefing conference.

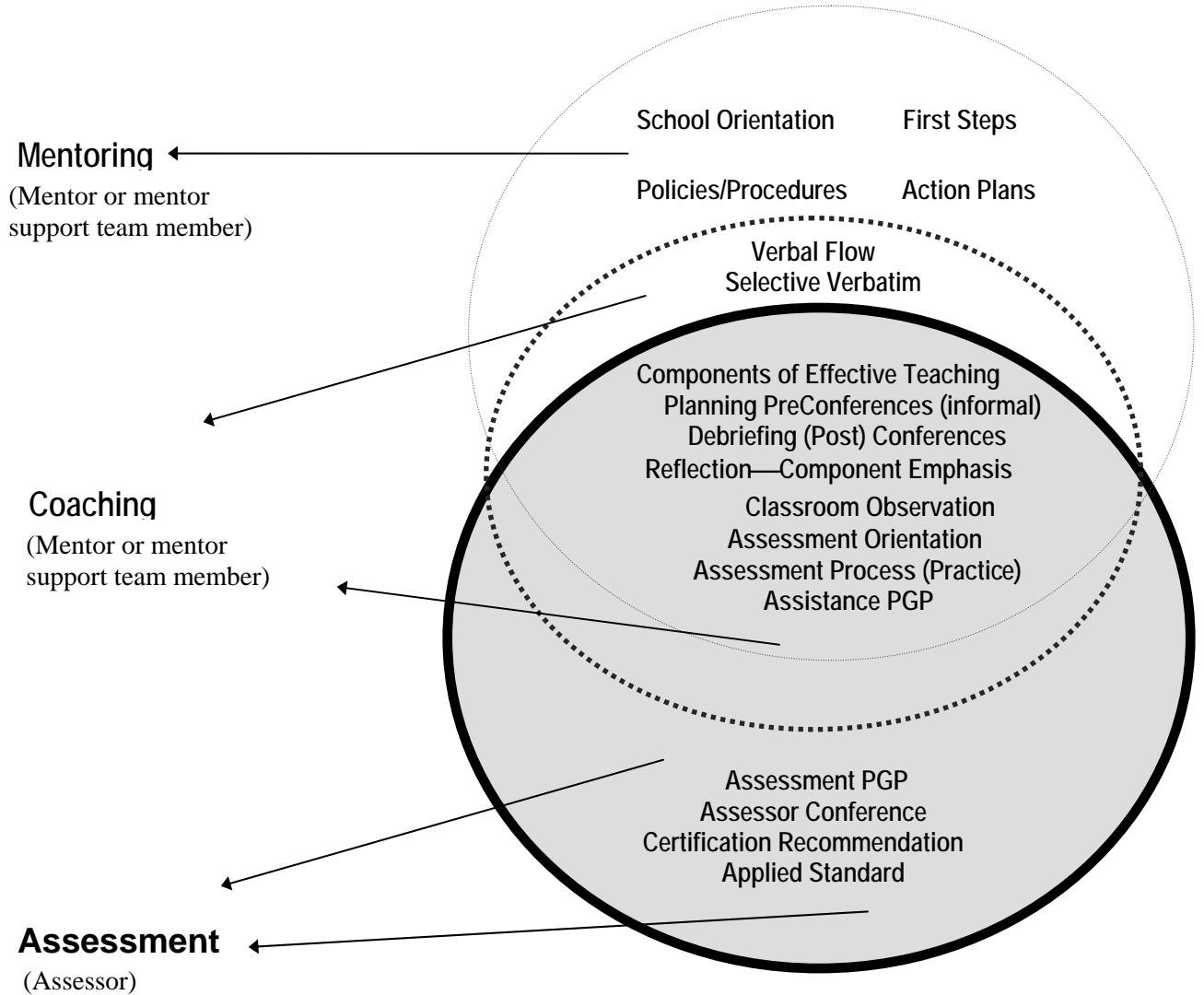
- **Debriefing Conference**

In the debriefing conference, the teacher and the coach share their observations and feelings about the lesson, search for cause-effect relationships, and solve problems. The coach asks questions to help the teacher reflect on and analyze the effectiveness of the lesson. In this stage of the coaching process, the concerns that surface in the discussion are addressed by the teacher's own guided problem solving. Because of the recursive nature of coaching, the debriefing conference usually ends with the decision either to repeat the current focus for further enhancement of the teaching skill or to select a new focus for development through coaching. The entire cycle begins anew.



A Review of Focused Coaching

The diagram below shows the unique and overlapping responsibilities of mentors or mentor support team members and assessors.



The Components of Effective Teaching define the primary teaching functions (curriculum planning, instructional planning, delivery of instruction, planning of student assessment process, management of outcomes, and classroom management). The first responsibility of a mentor or of a mentor support team member is to help the new teacher become a competent, confident teacher **within the framework provided by the Components**. The assessment process is merely the means of measuring the teacher's competencies in the same areas.

When mentors or members of the support team ask questions, they are collecting information about teachers' thinking and decision-making in the various components and teaching functions. Learning about teachers' thinking and decision-making is essential because these processes are the foundation of effective teaching.

All of the questions to which the mentor has been introduced fit a grand scheme. Each question correlates with a planning function—curriculum planning, instructional planning, assessment planning, and organizational/management planning. Each question elicits information about the teacher's decision-making in that area. The definitions of decisions that teachers make in these areas follow.

- Curriculum decisions decisions about **what** to teach
- Instructional decisions decisions about **how** to teach it
- Assessment decisions decisions about how to determine the effectiveness of what has been taught by measuring what has been learned
- Management decisions decisions about how to organize time, space, people, and processes
- Adaptive decisions decisions about how to change/adapt instruction in order to accommodate individual differences

Simply knowing what the teacher is or is not doing is not enough to help the teacher improve. The mentor or mentor support team member needs to know **how** the teacher arrives at those practices/activities/objectives, etc., and **why** he/she considers what is being done to be important. A mentor's role is to assist the new teacher in all levels of thinking.

Level 1: Knowing **what** I am doing (**practice**) This level is the lowest level of thinking.

Level 2: Knowing **how** I am doing it (**process**)

Level 3: Knowing **why** I am doing things this way (**rationale**)

Effective teaching encompasses all three of the above levels of thinking.

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