

**Executive Summary**  
**Coaching a Teaching Intern and a More Experienced Teacher Using Goal-Setting and Personal Reflection**  
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**Rationale/Research Question**

As a teacher who is working with other teachers in a coaching capacity, I was interested in looking more closely at the work that I do with teachers. I know that the teachers with whom I work have varying needs based on their levels of experience. I also know that though coaching is a growing field in the work of education, there are few models for excellent work in the support of teachers. I was not only interested in looking at best practice ways of supporting teachers, but looking closely at basing my support on the level of experience, goals and expressed areas of concern of teachers. I looked at the following question, through my work with a teaching intern and a more experienced teacher who is in her fourth year of teaching.

*What happens when goal-setting and personal reflection are used in a coaching/mentoring situation, involving both a teaching intern and an experienced teacher?*

**Definition of Problem**

As I considered my question regarding teacher reflection and goal-setting, I became very aware of the model of coaching that I was attempting to move beyond. Coaching can often feel to teachers as a) evaluative, or b) disconnected. Coaching tends to feel more evaluative when the coach knows little about what they are going to observe. Having little idea of the purpose of the lesson, the coach finds themselves more in the role of the expert giving out advice. As the teacher has little voice in this process, it can be more intimidating than supportive.

In a similar vein, when coaching occurs as the coach is available, rather than in a more predictable cycle, it does not build on prior coaching visits. Again, the coach can hit on specific pieces of the teacher's instruction, decision-making, planning or management, but the coach and the teacher are not able to truly collaborate to build the teacher's practice in a way that feels productive and sustainable.

**Data Collection Process/Tools**

The teaching intern (Kate) and the experienced teacher (Sara) with whom I work were receiving various levels of support from their school, and their urban teachers' education program. My role was to work on areas of their practice. In the case of the teaching intern, I observed and mentored her within the context of my third grade classroom. As is often true, the challenges of the teaching intern were more likely going to focus heavily on management, while she also learned curriculum, learned how to conference with students, learned how to meet the varied needs of students in the class and gained a presence as a leader in the classroom. My assumption in this case was that my support would be in the area of management, as well as in the areas of instruction that have to do with teacher planning and instructional decision-making.

The experienced teacher with whom I was working is a fourth year teacher who is in her first year of teaching at our school. I expected that management would be less of an issue in the case of this teacher with experience, and our coaching would focus more on areas of instruction; planning and carrying out effective units and lessons to engage students in their learning experiences. In this case, I expected to coach more closely around issues of curriculum. As I expected that management would be less of an issue, I believed that the work would go into planning and carrying out effective units and lessons to engage students' in their learning experiences, providing support and adjustments whenever necessary. My assumption was that my support would more likely come in around such areas of practice.

I observed each teacher four times, and after each observation, I provided the teacher with a set of questions to guide their reflection. They took time to complete the reflective questions before we sat down to debrief the lesson. In the case of the teaching intern, this work was done either during a prep period or as I was teaching. In the case of the experienced teacher, this reflective work was done either after school, during lunch or during a prep period. I

learned to pare the set of questions down for this teacher, after my first round of observation and reflective questioning, as the time commitment was voluntary and added to her typical day.

In each conversation, we started with the reflections that the teachers made about their lesson. This set a direction for the conversation to take. When necessary, I was able to guide the conversation to other areas of focus, but the conversations began in a self-guided manner, led by the teaching intern and experienced teacher. In looking at the impact of goal-setting and personal reflection, I was working to see how a more structured process of coaching, using 'teacher voice' to guide the process, affects the coaching process. I was also working to see how these processes could be adapted differently for a teaching intern and a more experienced teacher.

## **Data Analysis & Findings**

In most situations, Kate and I targeted similar areas of strength and concern. In all situations, Kate used the opportunity to think about her work in a way that was critical, reflective and provocative. Kate and I used her reflections to generate productive conversations that addressed needs that Kate had identified and that I have observed. From these reflective experiences and thoughtful conversations, Kate was able to take ownership of the process and was able to grow in the direction that she was ready to grow in at any given time.

As Kate and Sara's needs were different, I learned that the process of reflection and my role as a coach would also need to be different. For Kate, there was a learning process inherent in the reflective process. Kate was still figuring out which questions to ask of herself after a lesson, and is learning what to do when she answers those questions. The reflective process had not yet been internalized, but was being put to use. The process was helpful when it was utilized.

For Sara, the reflective process had been internalized. As we debriefed, Sara stated decisions that she was making, as well as questions that she continues to grapple with. Sara knew what questions to ask of herself and she was working on using the information to then make powerful decisions about her instruction.

## **Barriers/Limitations**

Because I was not working as a full or part-time release coach, but as a full-time classroom teacher, I was limited to working with my teaching intern and with one teacher, who agreed to receive additional coaching from me and to engage in a reflective coaching process.

## **Policy Implications/Recommendations**

In order for a process such as this to take hold, a coach would ideally have a coaching load of 10-12 teachers. This would provide the coach with ample time to spend in a teacher's classroom and the crucial time that is necessary to go through a reflective process with the teacher, culminating in a debrief conversation. Schools need to encourage this protected time for teachers and coaches to co-plan, collaborate and debrief lessons. I would strongly advocate for this time to be protected, coaches to have a manageable coaching load of 10-12 teachers and for a reflective process to be implemented.

## **Next Steps**

Because coaching is not easily measurable, it will continue to run the risk of losing funding when budgets are cut at a district level. Because administration is often overwhelmed by the responsibility of managing the budget of their school, overseeing mandates on policy and curriculum, communicating with parents and handling discipline issues within the school, administrators are not able to truly support their teachers in a coaching capacity. For teachers to develop their practice, they need to be pushed and supported. Teachers need to have coaches so that they can have their questions answered and receive guidance on their problems of practice. If this process is reflective and coaches are provided with enough time to collaborate and fully debrief lessons with teachers, it will be much more productive.

