

## **Coaching a Teaching Intern and a More Experienced Teacher Using Goal-Setting and Personal Reflection**

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As a teacher who is working with other teachers in a mentoring capacity, I am interested in looking more closely at the work that I am doing with teachers. I know that the teachers with whom I am working 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 am 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 questions, 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?*

In order to address this question through my research process, I looked closely at the subsequent set of sub-questions.

- \*How does the reflective and goal-setting process differ between a teaching intern and a more experienced teacher?
- \*How does a varied level of teacher experience impact the focus of the coaching work and the process of establishing a system for reflection?
- \*How does a focused reflection using an established set of questions, and debrief lead to a more effective follow-up coaching visit?
- \*Will it be beneficial to have an option for a written open dialogue, in addition to reflection on a lesson, or will this limit conversation and problem-solving over email?

As North Kenwood/Oakland Charter School is a charter school, we have based our decisions about curriculum on research conducted through The University of Chicago's creation and study of Everyday Math, and through Ohio State University's Literacy Collaborative. As a result of such research our math curriculum K-5 is an Everyday Math curriculum, and our literacy curriculum is a Balanced Literacy curriculum, consisting of Word Study/Phonics, Reading Workshop, Guided Reading and Writing Workshop based on the work of Gay Su Pinnell and Irene Fountas of Ohio State University. Based on teacher choice and student need, additional research-based methodologies are integrated based on using the work of leading educational researchers/practitioners such as Lucy Calkins, Regie Routman, Linda Hoyt, Katie Wood Ray, Judy Davis, Sharon Hill, Sharon Taberski and Stephanie Harvey. More information on North Kenwood/Oakland Charter School (which will be referred to as NKO from this point forward) will come below.

The University of Chicago is in its third year of operating a program called the Urban Teacher Education Program (UTEP). In this program, a selected group of University of Chicago seniors

begin their journey into a teaching career as they take classes around school equity, educational policy, literacy and math. They work at NKO in an after-school tutoring capacity, taking copious notes on each session and closely documenting students' progress. During the summer, they continue with methods classes and they work closely with the NKO Summer School program. At this time, they have initial experiences with leading Guided Reading groups and in leading the Summer School class in an interactive Read-Aloud.

By the time the UTEP Teaching Interns arrive at their first placement, they have engaged in conversations about curriculum, observed student progress, and made adjustments to their instruction based on students' needs. Each teaching intern works in two placements in Chicago schools. Interns will spend one half of the school year at NKO and the other half in a classroom in another south or west-side Chicago Public School.

The teaching intern and the experienced teacher with whom I am working are receiving various levels of support from their school and their urban teachers' education program. My role will be to work on areas of their practice. In the case of the teaching intern, I will be observing and mentoring her within the context of my third grade classroom. As is often true, the challenges of the teaching interns will be more likely to focus heavily on management, while they are also learning curriculum, learning how to conference with students, learning how to meet the varied needs of students in the class and gaining a presence as a leader in the classroom. My assumption in this case is that my support will 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 am working is a fourth year teacher who is in her first year of teaching at NKO. I expect that management will be less of an issue in the case of this teacher with experience, and our coaching will 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 expect to coach more closely around issues of curriculum. As I expect that management will be less of an issue, the work will 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 is that my support will more likely come in around such areas of practice.

My interest is to learn from their experiences in order to inform my growing work as a coach. I would like to turn the pressure away from being observed and put the pressure on our collaborative work to strengthen instruction and to meet the needs of the teacher and ultimately, of the students in the classroom. I plan to use a more focused process of reflection and goal-setting to inform my follow-up observation and to continue to assist the teacher as they grow in their practice. I hope to find a balance so as to support teachers without providing an extra burden in terms of time or expected work. I hope to support teachers as they grow and meet their needs. I hope to learn the different needs of teachers and use this knowledge, along with my knowledge of the learning curve in teaching, to support them where they are on a continuum of development as the instructional leader of a classroom.

## **School Context**

North Kenwood/Oakland Charter School (referred to from now on as NKO) opened in August, 1998, in a church basement, to the Chicago community. Over the past 8 years, NKO has grown, moving into the old Shakespeare building (which it shares with Ariel School) and currently serves 450 students, Pre-K through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. There are two classes per grade, Pre-K through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The school will grow to capacity over the next three years.

NKO is open to the Chicago community, and students are chosen through a lottery process. The school is supported through the University of Chicago Center for Urban School Improvement, which has recently opened a second charter school; Donoghue School. NKO is 99% African American. 95% of the students receive free or reduced lunch. Average class size is 25 students.

NKO has a very familial feel to it. Parents have come to NKO for their children through various ways. A portion of these families have been at NKO since its inception in 1998. One-third of the students at NKO live within 1 mile of the school. A portion of these families live in subsidized housing within blocks of the school, while other parents live in homes and apartments nearby. Of the families who receive free lunch, many of these students live in the neighborhood, within one mile of the school.

There is a feeling that many of the families who have found their way to NKO have done so through family friends at a church or mosque, or through a neighborhood connection. Parents who have found their way to this school who live outside of the neighborhood tend to have greater access to information about educational opportunities. As is often true in Chicago, neighborhoods are indicators of socio-economic status. Due to the various ways in which families make their way to NKO, there is a greater range in socio-economic status than one might find in a Chicago Public School neighborhood school. This can create an interesting dynamic at the school when it comes to school fees, book fairs, field trips and groups of friends between students and their families.

Even though a charter school is free, and the enrollment is based on a lottery process, many of the parents have a certain access to information that enables them to receive and complete an application by the January deadline, which you might not find at a nearby neighborhood school. From this, there tends to also be an increased level of parental involvement, which is strengthened by NKO's commitment to the parent-school partnership. This partnership is developed through a Back to School Picnic before school begins, Parent Curriculum Nights, a two-day Report Card Pick-Up with set times for conferences, Family Nights with movies and games at school and Bowling and Skating parties where families and staff are invited to attend.

NKO serves as a professional development site for The University of Chicago's Center for Urban School Improvement's USI's professional development work, where Chicago Public Schools' teachers learn from NKO teachers and where new programs in literacy, math, science, and technology are piloted and enhanced. NKO's curriculum is based on the most current research in literacy and mathematics pedagogy. To support this curriculum technology is integrated into the work that students and teachers do. Students frequently have access to laptops

from which they write Reader Response, publish Writing Workshop pieces, and conduct content-area research and complete Social Studies and Science projects.

## **Literature Review**

When teachers have a voice in their work in a coaching situation, I believe that they have greater buy-in to the process, thus gaining more from the experience. In order for change to occur it is important for a coach to work closely with teachers in order to create and follow through with an action plan, so they can provide support when and where it is needed. Because teachers are able to identify areas of focus, the process of guided reflection leads to increased confidence as well as a willingness to take risks as they work to improve their practice. As Ellen Moir, director of the New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz, states, “Rather than growing to fear assessment, teachers who work closely with a mentor gain the confidence to accept and implement the suggestions of their colleagues.” (Moir, 2003, “Launching the Next Generation of Teachers through Quality Induction”) The distinction which is an important one to make is the difference between a mentoring situation that feels evaluative to one that is collaborative and fosters a teacher’s ability to reflect upon their practice.

The process of reflection is broken down into greater detail by Carol Rodgers as she describes a reflective cycle, in which teachers experience an extended inquiry process, slowing down their thought process in order to observe and describe situations in their classroom. “The power of the reflective cycle seems to rest in its ability to first slow down teachers’ thinking so that they can attend to what is rather than what they wish were so, and then to shift the weight of that thinking from their own teaching to their students’ learning.” (Rodgers, 2002, Voices Inside Schools) The goal is that teachers will be able to skillfully observe their students’ learning and take action based on what they learn from their observations. The coach plays an important role in this process.

Starting with teachers’ experience in their own classroom heightens teachers’ interest in their work. Rodgers describes the reflective cycle in two levels. The first is reflection-on-action, which is reflection that happens either before or after teaching. With a coach, this reflection can be a collaborative process. As teachers begin their teaching career, they begin an evolution as a practitioner who has presence in their experience, the ability to provide a description of this experience, the adaptability to experiment with their practice based on students’ interests and needs and the capacity to analyze these experiences. Managing growth in these areas and an ability to reflect is supported by a coach. Over time, teachers become more adept in each of these areas and subsequently become more capable of reflection-in-action, which is reflection that is done in the moment. (Rodgers, 2002)

Coaches support change in teachers’ practice. Through conversations and observations, coaches are able to push teachers to elaborate on their own sense of their practice, learning more about teachers’ concerns and developing the capacity for the teacher to continually self-reflect. “As teachers we tend to go all day. We are constantly in a decision-making mode. It is crucial to build in time for teachers to stop and think. Building in time for reflection allows teachers to go deeper into their practice and process.” (Cindy Brunswick, Center for Urban School Improvement) Coaching is responsive to the teachers’ strengths and needs as it supports teachers

to respond to the needs of their students. In a conferencing situation, the coach often allows the teacher to direct the conversation, while ensuring that there is a good focus. (Toll, 2005, The Literacy Coach's Survival Guide). Out of each conference should come next steps for either the teacher or the coach, or both the teacher and the coach.

Effective coaches are able to find a focus for their coaching in a teacher's lesson. They are also able to lead teachers through a reflective process about their lesson and/or their practice as a whole. This requires of the coach strong analytical and inferential skills. (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001, Systems for Change in Literacy Education) A coaching observation may be either focused by a specified need of the teacher, an on-going conferencing situation involving goal-setting and analysis, or by the needs observed by a coach in a specific lesson. "Coaching will be effective if staff developers learn how to analyze teacher-student interactions during a reading or writing lesson, determine what changes a teacher must make immediately to improve student learning, and then bring about a shift in that teacher's knowledge and practice." (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001) In order for this process to be truly effective, it is crucial that the teacher views that there is a similar need for change. In the debriefing of the lesson or coaching conference, the teacher should be given an opportunity to reflect on the lesson's strengths and areas for growth. The coach should find a focus from the teacher's reflection and then share their relevant coaching points to support the teacher's learning. In order for this process to be productive, it must feel safe. The coach will be responsible for providing positive feedback, leading the teacher in a goal-setting process underscoring the understanding that learning is a process, and for challenging the teacher to continue to set high expectations for continued growth. (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001)

The role of a coach extends beyond strengthening a teacher's ability to execute a specific lesson or their capacity to plan a successful unit. The coach and teacher work together as the teacher grows and develops an overall expertise as a teacher. Developing an expertise as a teacher involves: building a teaching identity and philosophy; mastering a repertoire of instruction; developing a portfolio to demonstrate evidence of one's practice; working together with colleagues in a collaborative inquiry process, development of curricula and critical reflection of practice; and growing as a teacher leader. (Feimen-Nemser, 2000, "From Preparation to Practice: Designing a Continuum to Strengthen and Sustain Teaching") This level of coaching is often not reached due to time and resources, but it is an optimal model in supporting teachers' growth in the field.

When a school system is able to embrace the importance of fostering development of pre-service, new and experienced teachers, teachers become increasingly motivated and enthusiastic. Schools with a strong mission, a focus on collaboration and charismatic leadership are more easily capable of supporting new and veteran teachers with a constant push towards growth through collaboration and inquiry. "Major research studies state that in successful schools the organizational reconfiguration consists of administrators and teachers working together with collective action, agreed upon purposes, and the belief that their goals can be attained." (Pratzner, 1984; Lieberman, Saxl & Miles, 1988; Barth, 1990, in Davidson & Dell, "A School Restructuring Model: A Tool Kit for Building Teacher Leadership")

In order for this to take hold, however, this practice must be embedded in a school that embraces the processes of mentoring at all levels. “If new teachers are expected to engage in an ongoing cycle of collegial inquiry – posing questions of practice with colleagues, being observed, getting feedback, implementing feedback – then such practices must be embedded in the school culture.” (Caniff & Shank, 2003, “If You Do What You Always Did, You Get What You Always Got.”) In order for the mentoring experience to take hold through the years, it is crucial that the model of coaching is a collaborative coaching model, rather than an evaluative experience.

The attrition rate of teachers has recently been cited at 40% within the first four years in the profession. Moir states that student teaching and pre-service training are necessary, but that coaching is crucial for new teachers as they begin their teaching careers. Mentors not only ask and answer important questions about curriculum and classroom community, but they provide professional and emotional support and they share professional knowledge and enthusiasm for the great mission of education. “Mentoring helps transform the teaching profession from one of isolation and high turnover to one of collaboration, continuity, and community.” (Moir, 2003) It is through this that our teachers will continue to grow and share their expertise, strengthening both teacher and student learning. As teachers continue to feel motivated and supported in their continued learning, students will be more likely to achieve. (Lieberman, 1997, in Caniff & Shank, 2003)

### **Beginning Research**

In order for my research to begin, it was imperative that I was open about this research with the two participating teachers. I expressed to these teachers my interest in conducting this research in order to better meet their needs and support them in their work. I also explained that this process would help me to grow as a mentor and a coach. I gained their agreement to be a part of this study. Because my work was done closely with teachers, I did not need the permission of the parents of the children in the classrooms or of the administrators involved.

In order for my action research to be effective, I needed to make time to sit down with each teacher involved to discuss this process. I provided them with an opportunity to share and reflect on their strengths and to share their goals for our work together. In the case of setting up the research, and reflecting on teacher’s lessons, the time was made during my prep periods, before and after school. In the case of my work with the experienced teacher, my observations were also done during my prep periods. As the teaching intern was teaching in my classroom, the observations were done during normal instructional time for my students. This did not require additional time from me, as I would otherwise have been teaching.

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 were adapted differently for a teaching intern and a more experienced teacher.

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.

### **Coaching Kate – Teaching Intern**

#### **Data and Analysis**

My work with Kate in this process of reflection and goal-setting has enabled me to focus my observation, as well as the debrief conversation following the observation. In each coaching situation, Kate has taken time between the lesson and the conversation to debrief my observation to write out responses to a focused set of reflective questions. Kate's completed reflection forms are included in the Appendix (see Appendices 1 – 4). Following each debrief conversation, I spent some time after school reading through the reflection, my notes on the lesson and my notes on the debrief conversation. I would then write out my reflection of the lesson and the coaching experience around this lesson. Below I will break down the reflections that I wrote following each of the debrief conversations of my teaching intern.

October 13, 2005  
Literacy/Read-Aloud

Overall, Kate would like to push herself and would like support in the areas of teacher decision-making around management as well as around feeling out the level of engagement for all of the students. She also would like to do a better job of knowing what the goals of a lesson are, and she wants to be sure that these goals are made explicit to the students.

She would specifically like support from me around the areas of transitions, pacing of the lesson and explicitness of her language (particularly when she is using questioning strategies with the students).

In looking forward towards a lesson, it would be helpful for me to talk through the goals that Kate has in a lesson. It would also be helpful to have Kate write out and/or state these goals in the language that she will use with the students. In this same vein, I can support Kate as she plans her questions to use during a discussion. In terms of transitions and pacing, my advice was more targeted and specific based on my observations of today's lesson.

November 30, 2005  
Literacy/Read-Aloud

Though Kate would still like support with transitions and management, her bigger question from this reflection was around needing support in having a good understanding of where kids are in their experience and knowledge, and then deciding how she should move them forward.

In the area of management, Kate's question dives into the idea of quietly managing a behavioral issue without allowing it to completely stop the learning of the group. Alternatively, this could look more like how to manage a situation quickly and effectively and getting the group back on track. In certain situations, with certain students, it may be more effective to lean down and whisper, while in other situations, it is more effective to stop and look, or stop and restate the expectation while waiting for student engagement. And, in some situations, it is more important to provide a warning or consequence and encourage an acceptance of responsibility and steps towards improvement.

My goal in supporting Kate with this management is to help her read the behavior and pull on her understanding of a student as she decides how to manage each situation in an appropriate way.

December 19, 2005  
Everyday Math

Kate's two areas of concern and focus coming out of the lesson were around how to lift the level of student engagement and how to feel secure on the goals of the lesson so that she doesn't feel like she is cramming in a lot of material without really having a grasp on what the purpose of the lesson is. Because she felt less secure on what she was to get across, she felt like she was going through all of the pieces of the lesson without really engaging the students with the big message of place value in decimals.

I think that this can be made easier when you take a look at the goals of the lesson and take the time to look at the work students will be expected to do independently, to then narrow in on the purpose of the lesson. I do think that this comes more easily with experience in teaching Everyday Math. Because there are so many pieces to a lesson, it can be challenging to hone in on the purpose without getting bogged down by the many suggestions.

With teacher clarity, I do believe that there would be a heightened level of student engagement. Kate is beginning to gain confidence, which can be noted by her steady tone. Continued focus will continue to be on her ability to take a step back and gauge the tone of the class and bring the class together into a lesson.

January 17, 2006  
Everyday Math

Student Engagement continues to be a concern of Kate's. The few things that immediately come to mind are the quick pacing of the math message, the use of students at the board to share out their work for this time, and the use of humor when leading students in explicit teaching of the lesson. During this time, I think it is more important to be direct and explicit and then open up to students sharing their work, or, provide students with an opportunity to share their strategies with small groups or within a partnership.

Kate is interested in breaking the students into small groups for focused, differentiated instruction. In order for this to be possible, it is necessary that the whole-group instruction is engaging enough for the students to know what they need to know in order to work independently before small groups should be pulled.

### **Interpretation of Process for Kate**

As a student teacher, much of what Kate is learning has to do with her presence as a leader in the classroom, and her ability to make instructional decisions, both before a lesson and in the midst of her instruction. Kate's self-selected areas for focus were:

- management without complete interruption of instruction
- teacher decision-making
- responding to student needs
- delivery/communications
- and student engagement

As a student teacher, Kate is drawing from what she observes, what she tries out, and what she is able to learn through a process of reflection and trying again. Following each lesson, I provided Kate with a set of reflective questions to allow her to think critically and productively about her lesson. The questions are as follows:

- What felt good about today's lesson?
- What questions do you have about how the lesson went?
- What are your next steps related to student engagement?
- What are your next steps related to your tone/rapport with students?
- As a teacher, what are your next steps instructionally?

- How would you like me to support you in any of these areas going forward?

By providing Kate with the opportunity to reflect immediately following the lesson, and then following up on this reflection with a discussion based on what I had observed, but ultimately driven by her areas of concern, Kate was able to lead the debriefing conversations and ask reflective questions. Questions ranged from logistical issues, such as, “How can I make it a quicker, but quieter transition?” to questions about management during instruction. Kate asked, “What can I do when more than one student is acting ridiculously?” in her set of reflective questions, on November 30, 2005. This question came up for discussion in other lessons as Kate worked to manage student behavior while managing her own emotional reactions to their behavior.

As a coach, I was able to use Kate’s reflections as well as my own observations to guide Kate in a more focused way, through on-going conversations about planning, management, teacher language, questioning strategies, reading the students and making decisions based on what you see as a practitioner and gaining a strong sense of the purpose of your lesson. Questions such as, “What are some simple ways to make math more exciting? Voice, delivery, etc.?” which Kate asked on January 16, 2006, showed Kate’s ability to recognize that her presentation of a lesson affects student engagement. This level of reflection and growing self-awareness happened through conversations and observations in both a formally-observed and more informally-observed setting.

In order for this process to have been more effective, it would have been productive for us to revisit the points that Kate had outlined in her reflection before moving on to the next lesson. It would be productive for me to use her reflection, as well as my own, between lessons to develop a coaching plan for me and a goal-driven teaching plan for Kate.

### **Coaching Sara – More Experienced Teacher** **Data and Analysis**

Going into my second cycle of coaching, I have made the necessary adaptations to my lesson reflection format in order to meet the different needs of a more experienced teacher. As Sara is in her fourth year of teaching, and different from Kate, her areas of focus are not around management or pacing.

Leading up to my observation of Sara, we met to look at the writing work of her 1<sup>st</sup> grade students in Writing Workshop, and discussed where she would like to see them go in order to grow as writers. We discussed how this would work logistically and instructionally. As I observed Sara, and worked and planned with her, the focus was much stronger on the needs of Sara’s students as writers. We worked towards gearing Sara’s instruction to meet the identified needs of her students while planning writing units that honored an on-going writing cycle and using student work to inform instruction.

Using what I had learned from my first cycle of coaching, I used my observation and Sara's reflection to continue to set goals and make them explicit in my coaching plan. Sara and I worked together to create a working document as a teaching plan.

From my first observation of Sara, I am noticed that my tweaked form for reflection needed to be further tweaked. One of the major differences between Kate as a student teacher and Sara as an experienced teacher is the issue of time. It is Kate's number one responsibility to learn through her experiences. Sara's prime responsibility is to meet the needs of her students. Inherent in that difference is a slightly different focus on the priority of reflection. In Kate's case, there was flexibility for Kate to take time out after her lesson to sit and reflect on how the lesson went. In Sara's case, she has a full day of teaching, with very little time for preparation and/or formalized reflection during the day.

From this observation of my practice, I adjusted and simplified the reflection template. In doing so, I provided Sara with an opportunity to reflect on her instruction and her students' demonstration of meeting their learning goals. I maintained an emphasis around what she would like from me in terms of further support, what her teaching plan should include, and what my coaching plan should include until we meet to debrief the lesson.

February 23, 2005

Writing Workshop/Poetry

Sara has been implementing various cycles of Writing Workshop using the Lucy Calkins series Units of Study across the Year in a Primary Writing Workshop: Grades K-2. As she balances the scope and sequence of the books in the series with her students' work, she is working to make decisions based on where they are as she continually decides where she needs to go. Following this lesson, Sara questions what to do with the students who are still struggling to truly see their writing through the eyes of a poet. Students are working on using descriptive language to write about objects with a poet's voice.

Through Sara's observation of her students' work and my observation around their work through the lesson, it became clear that a worthy next step would be to set up and follow through on a good system for conferencing with students. We talked through different systems, and Sara decided to go back to a system that she had established using a folder and note-taking sheet. This will enable Sara to hone in on students' needs and work with them individually on their writing craft.

March 9, 2005

Writing Workshop/Poetry

Focus of Observation: Teacher Decision Making, Assessing where the students are and where to go from here using conferencing.

Sara feels that that having a plan to meet with students in conferences helped structure her conversations with students about their work. It also supported her in having a good understanding of where students were in their writing.

Sara's poetry mini-lesson focused on hearing line breaks in poems and using line breaks in writing poetry. The mini-lesson supported this focus well, as the students formed a poem in a pocket chart using descriptive language. When the students moved back to their seats, Sara began her conferences with individual students. As she did this, she was able to see which students were using line breaks in their writing, and which students were not. Though there were quite a few students who had internalized the mini-lesson and were demonstrating good use of line breaks, a handful of the students were writing their thoughts in sentences.

Sara and I conferred during the students' independent work time and decided that it would be worthwhile to have the students pause their work and share out a student's work that demonstrated good use of line breaks. In doing this, Sara was able to use student work to help some of her students get on the right track in terms of using line breaks.

For a next step, Sara would like to see a conference modeled in order to observe questioning and student coaching strategies.

March 29, 2006

Writing Workshop/Poetry

Sara is feeling more confident in her system and follow-through with her conferences with students. She is working to consistently meet with 2-3 students per day. If Sara sticks with this, and still allows herself to pop in for quick conversations with students who she notices have a particular need during a workshop time, she should be able to do a few things. The first is that Sara will have a good understanding of where her students are, which will allow her to make good decisions about the direction in which her mini-lessons will go. Sara's system for conferencing with students will allow her students in a conference to work through their challenges.

Once truly established, this will also allow the remainder of her class to work independently during a Writing Workshop. If the students know that Ms. Cromer has a schedule, and know that they are working independently as writers, they will feel a push to make good decisions about their writing on their own.

Sara's next steps are to work with the students on the Lucy Calkins poetry mini-lesson entitled, 'Showing not Telling'. Sara's task is to help students identify something of importance to them and to then bring meaning to their work by using sensory details and by honing in on a small moment within their poetry topic.

April 4, 2006

Writing Workshop/Poetry

Sara used her mini-lesson to quickly review strategies that poets use in a step by step process. From this point, Sara takes her students through these steps to write a poem about their independent reading time. The mini-lesson was very clear and engaging and set the students up well for their independent work.

Sara and I both noticed that many of the students were doing an excellent job of choosing a topic that had meaning to them and then focusing in on a small moment. We looked for this, and looked for evidence of students using line breaks in their writing. For most students, we noticed line breaks, though some were much more effective than others.

For some of the students, their work as a poet is still on a surface level. They are internalizing the steps necessary to write a piece that looks like a poem, but that does not feel like a poem. Sara would like help in working with the students to ensure that they are not writing a story that feels like prose, only uses line breaks. When asked what Sara would like to see from me, she says, “Would it be possible at some point for you to model a WW lesson for me to watch? I think that you have such powerful language when conveying ideas and clarifying things to my students that I want to grasp and move forward with.” In the upcoming weeks, I will meet with Sara to map out the direction for her instruction and ask her where she would like me to plan to model a lesson. At this time, Sara will take notes on my language and on the student work, which we will debrief together.

### **Interpretation of Process for Sara**

As a more experienced teacher, Sara has firmly established her presence as a leader of instruction and has created a positive classroom community. This immediately shifts the coaching focus from one of presence, language and management, as it was with Kate, to one of teacher decision-making around structuring lessons to fully encourage student growth. Sara’s self-selected areas for focus were:

- Teacher Decision Making in terms of choice of mini-lessons
- Assessing where the students are and choosing an instructional direction
- Using conferences systematically
- Choosing interventions based on students’ needs

In order to make the reflective process more helpful and focused, the number of questions utilized for Sara was reduced from 6, as it was with Kate, to three. The reflective questions were as follows:

- What felt good about today’s lesson?
- What are your next steps related to moving students from where they are to where you would like them to go?
- How would you like me to support you in any of these areas going forward?

In coaching Sara, the process of using reflective questions to guide our debrief conversations and determine next steps was helpful for me as a coach to know where to go next in my support of Sara. We would use these questions during our debriefing conversations to reflect on strengths and areas of concern from the lesson. On February 23, 2005, Sara asked, "I also wonder how I could be conferencing with students while they were working . . . and conferencing over something so new?" This helped us to establish a plan helping Sara to systematically conference with a set number of students during their independent work time in Writing Workshop.

We continued to work on this throughout the course of our work together. On April 4, 2006, Sara said, "I am also beginning to feel a bit stronger with the conferences that I am having and the content that I am beginning to bring into the meetings that I am having with my students." Not only did Sara's system boost her individualized work with students, but it began to feel richer to her in terms of content.

Sara would occasionally ask me a question during the course of the lesson whether or not I thought an intervention was necessary. In a lesson that focused on use of line breaks in poetry, on March 9, 2006, Sara noticed that, following her mini-lesson, many of the students were still writing their poems in a story form. When she asked me about my thoughts on this, I suggested that she stopped the students' work time and addressed the issue using an example of a student's poem that used a line break. In Sara's reflection, she wrote, "Also, I liked the outcome of the mini-lesson halfway through the work time. I think that after seeing some of the kids working and "getting it", it was a chance to share with others what I expect." Sara was able to make decisions and changes in the moment, rather than always waiting until the lesson was over to reflect on her instruction.

My debriefing conversations focused more on her next steps regarding instruction, which differed from Kate. The process for Kate built in a system of reflection that she will continue to internalize, whereas Sara demonstrates an ability to look at her students' work, mid-lesson, and reflect on what she can do to adjust to meet her students' needs. The reflective process enabled us to have more focused conversations, but evidenced by this example, it is a process that Sara has already begun to internalize.

## **Conclusions**

As teachers, it is crucial that we learn the needs of our students in order to meet them where they are and encourage their growth. In working as a coach, the same rule applies. In order to fully support teachers in their growth, a coach needs to fully appreciate where they are in their continuum of development as a teacher. As a beginning teacher, greater support is often needed around areas of management; developing and maintaining a strong classroom community, establishing a presence as the instructional leader of the classroom, and reacting to situations without disrupting the instructional flow of the day. As teachers gain experience in these areas, the shift of support often moves the focus towards the instruction, basing the teacher's needs on their questions of practice and on the evidence noted in their students' work. Coaches need to be aware of this continuum, but more importantly, need to have a process through which they have a comprehensive understanding of where their teachers are along this continuum.

A successful and effective model for coaching would most likely be one that is dependent on the experience level of the teacher, and uses the teacher's own goals as a starting point between a coach and the teacher. I have learned through my work with two teachers this year, the power of collaborative coaching. Providing teachers with a voice pulled them into the coaching experience and enabled them to guide the conversation to support their needs and celebrate their successes. This process built buy-in by both teachers and enabled their teacher-voice to drive the conversation. Using a reflective process also provided greater focus for the debrief conversations, enabling both the teachers, and me, as a coach, to set clear goals.

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 grown in at any given time. In this situation, Kate identified needs that I also saw as needs. She identified strengths that I also saw as strengths and she used her reflection and constant drive to be a stronger instructional leader and leader of a classroom community.

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 is 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 has not yet been internalized, but is being put to use. The process is helpful when it is utilized.

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

### **Barriers/Limitations**

Because I am not currently 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.

In order for a coaching situation to truly be effective, both the teacher and the coach would need to feel invested in the process. This model of coaching may need to be adapted in cases where teachers are not open to the idea of being coached. A willingness to be reflective with a coach is essential to the success of the process. The nature of the model is to allow for teachers to have a voice in the process, which may encourage greater buy-in from a reluctant teacher though this may not always be the case.

## **Policy Recommendations**

In order for a process such as this to take hold, schools would need to acknowledge the individual needs of teachers and provide coaching structures that meet teachers where they are in their professional growth. 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.

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 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.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Coaching Plan**

Name: Kate Byrne

Date: October 13, 2005

School: NKO

Grade: 3

Content Area: Literacy/Reading Workshop/Read-Aloud

Primary Focus of Observation: Content/Delivery/Communication

### **What felt good about today's lesson?**

The book itself kept the students engaged so refocusing them to listen to the story went more smoothly, kind of.

### **What questions do you have about how the lesson went?**

What are some better ways I can manage a student that is having trouble focusing? My tone of voice? Is this also an issue because of pacing & prep.?

Were the students actually able to use the strategy?

### **What are your next steps related to student engagement?**

I definitely feel like pacing was an issue and that engagement would have been much better if it wouldn't have stretched out for so long. Perhaps . . . \_\_\_\_

### **What are your next steps related to your tone/rapport with students?**

Think more about the language I'm using – making sure to put a positive spin on it or different \_\_\_\_\_ made. I also need to make it clear that the directions should be followed the first time.

### **As a teacher, what are your next steps instructionally?**

I need to make sure the goal/purpose of the lesson is clear to students and they are meeting the goal.

\*How do I "wrap" it up?

### **How would you like me to support you in any of these areas going forward?**

Transitions – making sure my expectations are clear, concise and to the point (particularly with the questions I ask.)

Pacing

## **Appendix 2**

### **Coaching Plan**

Name: Kate Byrne

Date: November 30, 2005

School: NKO

Grade: 3

Content Area: Literacy/Reading Workshop/Read-Aloud

**Primary Focus of Observation:** Observing Mini-Lesson and Work Time to see if mini-lesson and work time objectives were met. Objectives were to think about and generate questions that would help partners learn about their partners interests. Another objective was to work on the clarity of expectations leading towards improved student focus in the transition to the mini-lesson on the rug.

### **What felt good about today's lesson?**

I felt like the start of the lesson went much better than yesterday's because focus was less of an issue towards the beginning. I also think that my language was a little clearer today and I tried to reiterate the purpose of having the "biography" packet (i.e., to easily make paragraphs when transferring and drafting the actual biography). On the student side, I think that some students did a really nice job of going back to their seats and getting all of the information they could out of their partners, relating to the question, that is.

### **What questions do you have about how the lesson went?**

Sometimes I really don't know what to do when more than one student is acting out on the rug, especially if they're sitting near each other. I felt like battling them out or even having them move could be a distraction either way. I don't want to get an even worse reaction out of them when there's a consequence, though I do have to work on following through.

Here are a few more thoughts/questions that I have about the lesson:

-Though the focus of the observation was not content, I'm beginning to wonder if I'm giving them a lame introduction to biography, and that all they're learning how to do is follow my organizer and ask each other questions

-How can I make it a quicker, but quieter transition (this could apply to the end of reading workshop too)?

-What can I do when more than one student is acting ridiculously?

### **What are your next steps related to student engagement?**

I wanted this lesson to be relatively quick but I think that I ended up piling too many levels of instruction on top of one another. Yesterday, I was thinking about better explaining the central "theme" to each paragraph and then having them work on only the first part again.

As for anything else, any suggestion?

### **Appendix 3**

#### **Coaching Plan**

Name: Kate Byrne

Date: December 19, 2005

School: NKO

Grade: 3

Content Area: Everyday Math 5.11

Primary Focus of Observation: Teacher Decision Making and Responding to Student Needs/ and Delivery/Communication

#### **What felt good about today's lesson?**

I felt like I was really prepared for the lesson and that I'd gone through the Everyday Math lesson pretty thoroughly. Most of the lesson consisted of cutting out a place-value tool and I think that it was a good decision to have them pre-made for the kids. My goal, in doing this, was to have students focused more on the content and not around some mindless activity.

#### **What questions do you have about how the lesson went?**

Well, I think the actual managing of the materials was troublesome, particularly when I was trying to have them flip the pages to find the numbers.

-Would it have been better to (which we kind of discussed already) to just call out a number and have them flip through it? Or, tell them to put certain numbers in the place-value boxes, then asked them what the numbers was? (Sometimes I struggle with figuring out what I should be teaching explicitly...which could probably support the kids who struggle with certain concepts a little better.)

What were some key things that I left out that should have been covered? (For example, when I was explaining how to transition from .9 to 1.0, I don't think it was very clear and most of the students were unsure.)

How prepared should I be for those kids that consistently say "I'm done?"

#### **What are your next steps related to student engagement?**

Well, I'm not entirely sure. The lesson in general was extremely boring and that's probably why some of the kids were off task, and even sleeping. What are some ways that I can gear up the lesson in terms of engagement? I think this is something that I'll struggle with in math, well actually, in general. (Sometime I'm so concerned about getting all of the content in that my tone and delivery become sort of monotonous.)

#### **What are your next steps related to your tone/rapport with students?**

I was really frustrated today and staying positive was a little more challenging than I expected. I think that engagement can really come into play here, especially if I'm making learning these concepts a little more exciting.

**As a teacher, what are your next steps instructionally?**

Well, I'd definitely have all of the books prepared again but I'd probably concentrate on the actual value of the numbers after the decimal, relating them to what they already know about 1s, 10s, etc.

I could use some of the suggestions here because I'm sometimes overwhelmed by the Everyday Math lessons.

**How would you like me to support you in any of these areas going forward?**

I think that I could really benefit from a discussion on the math lesson that I'm going to do that day, which would mean that I would have to be more on the ball with being prepared early enough (maybe two days ahead) to be able to discuss these lessons.

Also, I think that making math exciting could really push those kids who feel like they're unsure of themselves and that they don't understand, to *want* to learn more.

## **Appendix 4**

### **Coaching Plan**

Name: Kate Byrne

Date: January 17, 2006

School: NKO

Grade: 3

Content Area: Everyday Math 6.5

Primary Focus of Observation: Management and Delivery/Communication

#### **What felt good about today's lesson?**

Before starting the lesson I decided to give them a quick warm-up, asking them to draw five shapes that had four sides. Many of the students were successful at this and even though it's possible that they were using a chart I'd put up earlier on, it's still really resourceful.

Also, my language revolving around the naming of the quadrangle was much clearer and I'm hoping that the students will be much more successful with this in the future, including with triangles.

#### **What questions do you have about how the lesson went?**

After the lesson was over, I wasn't really sure what the students took away from it. I knew that they were most likely able to identify that a quadrangle had 4 sides/vertices/angles but I'm not sure if they could easily generate the properties of those quadrangles.

My "exploration of quadrangles" fell apart and I wish I could have structured it in a way that led to quick but smooth group work

#### **What are your next steps related to student engagement?**

I continue to struggle with student engagement in mathematics and could use any suggestions. I'm also still struggling with finding a balance between explicit instructions and probing student thought.

What are some simple ways to make math more exciting? Voice, delivery, etc.?

#### **What are your next steps related to your tone/rapport with students?**

I feel like rapport isn't a problem. It's that numerous pauses during the lesson, for management purposes, sometimes disrupt the flow. As suggested before, I'm going to try relying more on nonverbal cues for the kids (i.e., wow, not meeting expectations, table point), avoiding any sort of negotiation among students. Though, there is one student in particular who is a consistent problem.

#### **As a teacher, what are your next steps instructionally?**

Pulling small groups for guided math has been a difficulty and I have only tried it once. Thus, I would like to make it so students are exploring different concepts, on their own, but in their groups.

**How would you like me to support you in any of these areas going forward?**

I need a lot of help with trying to figure out when and how I can coordinate small group work, so I could use some advice on that, or reassurance. Also, how and when do I balance explicit instruction with probing?

## Appendix 5

### **Coaching Plan**

Name: Sara Kramer

Date: February 23, 2006

School: NKO

Grade: 1

Content Area: Writing Workshop/Poetry

Primary Focus of Observation: Looking at where the students are in their WW process and making decisions on where to take the learning from here.

What felt good about today's lesson?

**I think that seeing some of the kids using the creative thinking behind poetry (through a "poet's eyes) type thinking made me realize that I did explain the lesson well enough in detail for them to grasp the ideas behind what I was looking for.**

What questions do you have about how the lesson went?

**I wonder if the way in which I went about explaining the lesson made sense. (I have a feeling that it kind of did, being that some of the kids showed results in their writing.) I also wonder how I could be conferencing with students while they were working...and conferencing over something so new?**

What are your next steps related to moving students from where they are to where you would like them to go?

**I am working through the Lucy Calkins poetry workshop mini-lessons in order, pretty much. I am liking their ideas that they are writing about. I guess I am kind of stuck with the kids that do not understand how to write through the poet's eye. I still believe that they can be poets, but with a different style. How would you address this issue?**

Whose writing did you see, and what did you notice?

**I looked at Jala's writing and noticed that she compared the teddy bear to being soft, like her pillow. (This is the only one I can remember off hand.)**

How would you like me to support you in any of these areas going forward?

**I would like to hear what you are noticing from observing. It is very helpful to me to hear a person's view that was observing. Also, I would like for you to help me figure out a great way to fit conferencing in everyday that I have WW.**

## Appendix 6

### **Coaching Plan**

Name: Sara Kramer

Date: March 9, 2006

School: NKO

Grade: 1

Content Area: Writing Workshop/Poetry

Primary Focus of Observation: Looking at where the students are in writing/understanding line breaks in poetry.

What felt good about today's lesson?

**It took off a little bit slowly with the intro that was pretty flat. I think that using the cut-up poem, in which we manipulated the words around to find the right pattern for a poem really helped the kids to understand that there are not complete sentences on each line. Also, I liked the outcome of the mini-lesson halfway through the work time. I think that after seeing some of the kids working and "getting it", it was a chance to share with the others what I expect.**

**I also liked the impact that a little bit of the conferring did for the students that needed more support in this lesson.**

What are your next steps related to moving students from where they are to where you would like them to go?

**From the last lesson, I have worked on line breaks for another day. During this lesson, we did a shared writing as a class and wrote a new poem about fish. We were concentrating on not writing whole sentences, but rather breaking them, to form a poem.**

**I am also continuing with the Poetry unit, using the lessons in the Calkins book. I will be moving into the lesson about hearing music in poetry. We have talked a little bit about poetry being like music and having some beat or rhythm to it, but it will be the main focus.**

How would you like me to support you in any of these areas going forward?

**I think that having an understanding of what a conference should look like would really help. Maybe by seeing a modeled conference would help too. It would help to hear the kinds of questions that you would ask and also to see what types of notes you would ask the kids.**

## **Appendix 7**

### **Coaching Plan**

Name: Sara Kramer

Date: March 29, 2006

School: NKO

Grade: 1

Content Area: Writing Workshop/Poetry

Primary Focus of Observation: Review Strategies that Poets Use

Writing a Poem using these strategies

#### **What felt good about today's lesson?**

I liked noticing that kids were getting the big picture of adding line breaks. I also was excited that some of my students were adding their 5 senses to the poems. I think a lot of what helped this happen was the shared writing that we did together at the beginning of the lesson. Despite the fact that we had a few interruptions in the lesson, I think that the kids had such a concrete, personal example of what the poem could look and sound like.

#### **What are your next steps related to moving students from where they are to where you would like them to go?**

Some of the kids are still writing a story, but just putting line breaks into their stories to make it look more like a poem. I am thinking about a structure lesson based on this idea. Also, I want to continue working through the poetry book by Calkins. I think I might skip right to the lesson, Showing Not Telling. I think that this lesson will help my students understand that poetry conveys meaning and through this meaning the writer should be thinking of words that help the reader create pictures in their mind of the information in the poems.

#### **How would you like me to support you in any of these areas going forward?**

Would it be possible at some point for you to model a WW lesson for me to watch? I think that you have such powerful language when conveying ideas and clarifying things to my students that I want to grasp and move forward with. I know that you are super busy, but if this is possible, I would love for it to happen! Thanks😊

## **Appendix 8** **Coaching Plan**

Name: Sara Kramer

Date: April 4, 2006

School: NKO

Grade: 1

Content Area: Writing Workshop/Poetry

Primary Focus of Observation: Finding Ingredients for a Poem

### **What felt good about today's lesson?**

I think today allowed my students to add more meaning into their poems. It was a chance for the kids to notice that poems can sound a little bit dry unless you add strong feelings to the poem. The kids were able to understand and recognize the idea that as a writer, if you are able to convey feelings within your poem, then your reader is able to have a better understanding of your writing/poems.

I am also beginning to feel a bit stronger with the conferences that I am having and the content that I am beginning to bring into the meetings that I am having with my students. This will directly help my students with pieces of writing that they need individualized help on. I definitely need to be more consistent in terms of meeting with 2-3 per day, so that I can meet with each student an average of at least twice a month, if not more.

### **What are your next steps related to moving students from where they are to where you would like them to go?**

I thought about skipping today's lesson, feeling like my students would not need to work on this particular part of poetry and I am definitely glad that I did not miss out on this great opportunity for teaching. Therefore, my next step is exactly what it was in the last reflection because that is the lesson that follows this lesson in the poetry lessons book, Showing Not Telling. In this lesson, my students will continue working on adding feelings to their writing.

### **How would you like me to support you in any of these areas going forward?**

I would still like to see a lesson modeled, so I can continue to build my language. I think that by improving my language as I am teaching, I will be able to help my students better understand exactly what I am looking for in their poetry writing.

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