
Introduction

With the publication of *Student-Centered Coaching* (2011) and *Student-Centered Coaching at the Secondary Level* (2013), Diane created a theoretical framework for supporting teachers by focusing on outcomes for students. This approach has taken off because it makes sense to increase student achievement and develop teacher capacity—all at the same time. Yet, as we work with schools and districts to implement student-centered coaching, we are continually asked, “But what does it really *look* like?” This book will answer that question by breaking down the practice of student-centered coaching into a collection of “coaching moves” that are used throughout the process.

OUR COACHING BELIEFS

While this book will drill down into the *moves* for student-centered coaching, we have also come to realize that they don’t mean a lot if they aren’t grounded in a set of beliefs about why we are here in the first place. Time and time again, we have circled back on our beliefs when we find ourselves struggling in our coaching.

The following question that was sent to Diane on Twitter underscores how our beliefs drive our work. You’ll notice that Diane’s response brought the coach right back to her beliefs and how they impact her work with teachers.

Message to Diane:

Can student-centered coaching work when a teacher does not have good classroom management nor her routines and procedures established? Should I work with the teacher first on classroom management/routines/procedures or dive in with student-centered coaching?

Diane's Response:

The key is that you work on a goal that the teacher has set. Not a goal that you think the teacher should set. In my experience, the teacher has to be an invested partner in the process. We find that while classroom management may be an entry point to coaching, we hope to see the standards driving our coaching cycles. That way we can make sure that we are impacting student learning.

Coach's Response:

Thank you! I have to change my mindset and be an advocate for change. We haven't necessarily been willing to give teachers, especially teachers who are struggling in certain areas, the opportunity to set their own goals. We tend to set the goals for the teachers and then work with the teachers to accomplish them. This, of course, is not always well received. Still trying to switch!

In reading this exchange, you may have picked up on the fact that the coach was feeling unsure about where to start with her coaching. Leading her back to the belief that teachers own their own work and set their own goals reminded her that we need to avoid the trap of "fixing" teachers—a belief that is essential when it comes to working honestly and authentically with adult learners.

We often ask teams of coaches to write down the beliefs that underpin their work with teachers. Sometimes we fear they may be wondering, "Why are we doing this? I thought I was going to learn strategies for coaching." Yet, we continue to find that reflecting on our beliefs is essential because they drive most every part of how we work with adult learners. Being clear about them, and then aligning them with our actions, is a powerful step toward being an effective coach. If you haven't written down your own beliefs, we suggest that you do so. Now we'd like to share ours.

1. Increased student achievement—for all students every day—is why we are here.
2. It's not our job to fix teachers or to be the expert on all things. Everyone brings varied experience and expertise to the table.
3. The goals of others drive our work. We can't tell people what to care about.
4. Our work is ongoing—it doesn't happen in single conversations.

5. Relationship is an important factor but not our goal.
6. We are smarter together, and collaboration is critical.
7. Everyone is a learner, and our work is never done.
8. We assume best intent. Everyone cares about kids and is doing the best job that they can.

CORE PRACTICES FOR STUDENT-CENTERED COACHING

There are seven core practices that are foundational to student-centered coaching. While these core practices have always been a part of our work, we now see them more clearly due to countless hours of implementing student-centered coaching in a variety of schools and districts. As you explore this book, you will notice that we touch on most of these core practices in a variety of ways, just like we would suggest you do in your own coaching work.

1. Organizing Coaching through Cycles

One-shot opportunities for professional development do little to improve student learning. Coaching cycles provide job-embedded professional development that is ongoing and data driven. Taking a more thorough approach to coaching provides both the time that students need to master the standard and the time that teachers need to develop their skill in delivering instruction that moves student learning forward. More on this in Chapters 1 and 3.

2. Setting Goals for Coaching Cycles

Coaching cycles are driven by goals for student learning rather than by what we think the teacher *should* be doing. This keeps coaching focused on student achievement and away from evaluation. More on this in Chapter 1.

3. Using Standards-Based Learning Targets

Learning targets create the criteria for measuring student growth. Using student-friendly learning targets ensures that we are focused and deliberate about what we teach and how we assess. More on this in Chapter 2.

4. Using Student Evidence to Co-Plan Instruction

Using student evidence means that we are formatively assessing on a continual basis. Looking at student evidence creates opportunities to make informed instructional decisions. We sort student work according to patterns and then deliver differentiated instruction that matches exactly where the students are on any given day. More on this in Chapters 4 and 7.

5. Co-Teaching with a Focus on Effective Instructional Practices

Student-centered coaching is based on a partnership approach where the teacher and coach work side-by-side with students. When coaches work in classrooms, it ought to be hard to tell the difference between the coach and teacher because they are equally as engaged in the instruction. More on this in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

6. Measuring the Impact of Coaching on Student and Teacher Learning

We believe that coaches are obliged to make sure that their coaching is impacting student and teacher learning. We use the Results-Based Coaching Tool to support this process. More on this in Chapter 9.

7. Partnering with the School Leader

Coaches can't do this work without the support of the school leader. We often hear from coaches who are supported and making an enormous impact on student and teacher learning. Then we meet others who are feeling less than supported in their schools and having less successful results in their coaching. Developing this partnership is essential if we are to take full advantage of our role as coaches. If you are interested in this topic, we'd recommend you read *Student-Centered Coaching: A Guide for K-8 Coaches and Principals* (2011).

STUDENT-CENTERED COACHING IS DRIVEN BY FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT DATA

Carol Ann Tomlinson (2014) writes, "A great teacher is a habitual student of his or her students. A keen observer, the teacher is constantly watching what students do, looking for clues about their learning progress, and asking for input from students about their status" (p. 10).

The notion of formative assessment, and of the teaching and learning cycle in which we assess, plan, and teach, is fundamental to the implementation of student-centered coaching. We work with teachers to interpret their formative assessment data (or student evidence, as we prefer to call it) so that they can scaffold, support, and extend learning—in the next moment or in the next day’s lesson.

While schools are awash in summative assessments and high stakes test results, we don’t find these types of data to be particularly useful during coaching cycles. We understand that progress monitoring is an important piece of the bigger picture of school improvement; it just doesn’t inform our coaching conversations.

With an emphasis on qualitative rather than quantitative, we can use data to guide us toward our next steps in the classroom. This continual use of student evidence is what allows us to ensure that students are progressing toward the standards.

HOW STUDENT-CENTERED COACHING COMPARES WITH OTHER COACHING MODELS

As you dig into this book, you may be wondering how student-centered coaching compares with other ways of delivering coaching. We define coaching as “student-centered,” “teacher-centered,” or “relationship-driven,” and the figure below outlines each of these methods in terms of the role of the coach, the focus for coaching, the use of data and materials, how the coach is perceived, and the role of relationships. We find that starting here helps coaches and school leaders understand how student-centered coaching compares with other ways of approaching coaching.

More Impact on Students-----Less Impact on Students			
←-----→			
	Student-Centered Coaching	Teacher-Centered Coaching	Relationship-Driven Coaching
Role	The coach partners with teachers to design learning that is based on a specific objective for student learning.	The coach moves teachers toward implementing a program or set of instructional practices.	The coach provides support and resources to teachers.

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More Impact on Students-----Less Impact on Students			
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	Student-Centered Coaching	Teacher-Centered Coaching	Relationship-Driven Coaching
Focus	The focus is on using data and student work to analyze progress and collaborate to make informed decisions about instruction that is differentiated and needs-based.	The focus is on what the teacher is, or is not, doing and addressing it through coaching.	The focus is on providing support to teachers in a way that doesn't challenge or threaten them.
Use of Data	Formative assessment data and student work are used to determine how to design the instruction. Summative assessment data is used to assess progress toward mastery.	Summative assessment data is used to hold teachers accountable, rather than as a tool for instructional decision making.	Data is rarely used in relationship-driven coaching.
Materials	Textbooks, technology, and curricular programs are viewed as tools for moving student learning to the next level.	The use of textbooks, technology, and curricular programs is the primary objective of the coaching.	Sharing access and information to textbooks, technology, and curricular programs is the primary focus of the coaching.
Perception of the Coach	The coach is viewed as a partner who is there to support teachers to move students toward mastery of the standards.	The coach is viewed as a person who is there to hold teachers accountable for a certain set of instructional practices.	The coach is viewed as a friendly source of support that provides resources when needed.
Role of Relationships	Trusting, respectful, and collegial relationships are a necessary component for all forms of coaching.		

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While student-centered coaching focuses on student performance, teacher-centered coaching is framed by the theory that if we develop the technical expertise of teachers, then student achievement will increase as well. The focus is on guiding teachers to use a specific program or set of instructional practices. It often blurs the line between coaching and evaluating

because the emphasis is on “getting people to do things” and may create distrust and resistance among teachers. Relationship-driven coaching is less about holding teachers accountable and more about providing them with resources and support. It often feels safer because the coach’s role is about making the lives of teachers easier. And since coaches learn that resistance is often par for the course, some may choose to back off and provide a more resource-based style of coaching.

The approach that a school takes often depends on its philosophy about how to improve teaching and learning. It may also depend on the school culture and relationships that a coach has with teachers. It isn’t uncommon for coaches to engage in all three types of coaching in a single school—or even on a single day. But one has to wonder: If we really want to ensure that our students are learning, doesn’t it make sense to make coaching about them?

MOVING FORWARD

It is our hope that this book will provide a practical vision of what it looks like to engage in student-centered coaching across a rich array of contexts. We are often asked by coaches if they are “doing it right.” This question can be a hard one to answer because every decision is based on so many factors that there really isn’t a right or wrong way. Rather, it’s about making decisions that stay true to your purpose and beliefs. We hope you will walk away from this book with a variety of coaching moves, along with an understanding of exactly what they look like and why they matter. But remember that your insights, experiences, and beliefs are just as important as anything that we share in these pages.