

## The Art of Coaching Conversations: Using Language to Impact Instruction

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## Way back when...

Think back to when you were a *new* literacy coach...

- What was most important to you...
  - Organizing reading materials?
  - Analyzing data?
  - Modeling lessons?
  - Understanding curriculum?
- What was it – *really* – that would make or break your success as a literacy coach?

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## Considerations

What is the nature of the coaching conversations you are currently having with the teachers at your school?

*Talk with a partner.  
Jot down some of the big ideas.*

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Are your coaching conversations powerful enough to “*change behavior without force?*” Why or why not?

*Talk with a partner .  
Jot down some of the big ideas.*

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Are you a proficient enough user of language to use it in ways that assist teacher learning? Why or why not? What can you do about it?

*Talk with a partner .  
Jot down some of the big ideas.*

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**Literacy Coaches...**

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help to bridge educators’ visions of evidence-based practice and what teachers *do* every day in the classroom.

Shanklin, Rainville, Ankrum, Morewood, 2007

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### Interesting things to come:

Consider the idea of '*evidence-based practice*' and the emerging emphasis on '*innovation*.'

- How will the skillful use of language play a role in stimulating innovation to increase student capabilities as readers and thinkers?

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### A Central Theme

*Communicating* and establishing trusting relationships with teachers who are trying to change their practice requires being sensitive to their dilemmas, fears, and celebrations.

Coaches must be able to observe accurately and provide teachers with appropriate feedback about their practice in a respectful and collaborative manner.

Feger, Woleck, Hickman, 2004

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### If we have learned anything....

“from Vygotsky (1978), it is that “children grow into the intellectual life around them.” That intellectual life is fundamentally social, and language has a special place in it.”

Johnston, 2004

*Keeping this in mind...*

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### We propose that...

teachers also grow into the intellectual life around them; that the intellectual life is fundamentally social, and that language has a special part in it.

*Coaches must make something of what teachers say and do.*

Johnston, 2004

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### An example

Suppose a book study session has deteriorated into chaos:

- some teachers are engaged in sidebar conversations;
- some are griping about how much they have to do;
- some are trying to read the chapter that was supposed to have been read prior to the session.....

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### Perhaps the coach says:

- “We need to get focused on this content or we’ll be here late into the afternoon.....”
- “When we get involved in sidebar conversations or are not prepared, it makes me feel frustrated.....”
- “Let’s come back together.....there seems to be a problem....what can we do to get back on track?”

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## Language as a tool for thought...

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### Exchange of Knowledge

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- **Pedagogy:** transmission of knowledge
  - Literacy coach has the full responsibility for making decisions
  - Suppose a book study session has deteriorated into chaos
  - Subject-centered learning
- **Andragogy:** construction of knowledge
  - Literacy coach is facilitating the acquisition of content
  - Solution-seeking learning
  - Considered the art and science of teaching adults

*There can be **hidden costs** in telling people things.*

Johnston, 2004

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The coach must be strategic in the manner in which she/he engages in the conversation – the coach has to negotiate the difference between telling and revealing. The coach needs to consider how to reveal through “telling in a different way”. They need to think ahead to the outcome and back-up discussions with their observational notes and data.

*Keeping this in mind...*

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### A Word of Caution

“The better you know something, the more risk there is of behaving egocentrically in relation to your knowledge. Thus, the greater the gap between teacher and learner, the harder teaching becomes.”

Donaldson, 1978

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### Cultivating *Thinking Teachers*

Literacy coaches *challenge* teachers to transform their instruction to improve student learning.

Literacy coaches *facilitate* teachers' reflection on students learning and their own theories of practice.

Literacy coaches and teachers *collaboratively* discuss their perceptions of the lesson and possible alternatives for increasing student learning.

Literacy coaches play a key role in developing *ongoing support* for literacy instruction and an opportunity for teachers to reflect on and discuss their instruction.

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### What does it sound like?

- The language of *challenge*?
- The language of *facilitation*?
- The language of *collaboration*?
- The language of *support*?

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## Language as an art...



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### Effective Communication Skills

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Through coaching conversations, the teacher is guided to reflect on the *possibilities* and *differences* that occur in the classroom that increase student learning.



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### Using Collaborative Language

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The artful use of language by the literacy coach provides the opportunity for quality collaborative conversations with the teacher(s) about teaching and student learning.



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### The Art of the Conversation

- Work with a partner and start a conversation about a real issue that is currently on your mind. During the conversation, the listener (coach) needs to practice *effective communication skills* highlighted in the presentation. After **two minutes** of discussion, switch roles.
- Recount the path of the conversation. How did the purposeful use of language effect the outcome of the conversation?

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### Language as a catalyst for coaching conversations...

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### Coaching Prompts

- Tell me what you were doing when ...
- Describe the students' behavior when . . .
- After this lesson, can you describe how the outcomes matched your goals?
- How did you recognize the need to switch approaches?

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### Prompts Continued

- It seems as if you're curious about alternative methods of teaching grammar?
- Your action plan was focused on questioning strategies. Let's begin with a review of the questions you asked?
- You said your lesson flowed. What did you do to facilitate this success and what would you want to continue in the future?
- Now that you better understand the supports a book needs for students to read during guided reading, what are two changes you could make in your classroom practice?

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### Think About It

- Does the prompt represent you as **an expert** or a **person with expertise**?
- Which view would be beneficial to your coaching?

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### Language exploration – a glimpse into coaching conversations

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**Construction ...**

*structured with*

- Coaching conversations *structured with* the exchange of dialogue that occurs between the teacher and the coach sets the stage for learning and growth to occur for all.

*Keep this in mind as you view the coaching conversation.*

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**Watch This**

**Post Conference Conversation  
Coach and Teacher**

Watch  
Take Notes  
Be Ready to Discuss



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**Talk About It**

**Discuss the impact of language on instruction.**

*You may consider:*

- What did you notice about the coaching conversation?
- Could the skillful use of language in this coaching conversation play a role in stimulating innovation to increase student capabilities?
- Did the use of the language of the conversation impact instruction?

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### Consider

- Will the nature of the coaching conversations you are having with the teachers at your school change?
- How are your coaching conversations going to be powerful enough to “*change behavior without force?*”
- How can you be a proficient enough user of language to use it in ways that assist teacher learning?

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### Reflect

Given all that we have discussed during this session, **reflect on these quotes...**

- Coaching is a conversation directed toward *inquiry*: the reading coach and teacher are *making hypotheses* and *searching for information*. Their greatest source of data are their observations of children as they look for evidence of learning.
- The purpose of coaching conversations is to use *teachers' own thinking* – what they want to accomplish – as a springboard to reveal *how to change their behavior*.

Lyons and Pinnell, 2001

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