The Essential Guide for Student-Centered Coaching

Dedicated to our kids:
Quinn and Eva
Lorenzo, Lila, and Fiona

The Essential Guide for Student-Centered Coaching

What Every K–12 Coach and School Leader Needs to Know

Diane Sweeney
Leanna S. Harris

CORWIN

Contents

online resources

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Resources.corwin.com/EssentialGuideforSCCoaching
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Acknowledgments

Almost a decade after Diane launched the idea of Student-Centered Coaching, neither of us could imagine that things would come this far. What started with a simple question of "What about the kids?" has resulted in thousands of coaches, principals, and district administrators creating systems of professional learning for teachers that put student learning front and center.

Across the United States and beyond, in districts large and small, amazing coaching is happening. As we have the opportunity to work with coaches and administrators doing this important work, we are continually learning from their experiences. So it is only fitting that first and foremost we want to thank the coaches and leaders who have helped us refine and grow our thinking around Student-Centered Coaching. Your successes, adaptations, and challenges are woven into every part of this book.

We'd also like to thank the teachers who we've partnered with over the years. Their dedication, care, and concern for the students in their classrooms make coaching a true joy. There is no place we'd rather be than working alongside you in your classrooms.

We are also fortunate to work with an incredible team. Amanda Brueggeman, Joy Casey, Rachel Jenner, Ann Mausbach, Brooke O'Drobinak, Julie Steele, Karen Taylor, and Julie Wright are dedicated and passionate coaches/consultants whose experience and expertise continues to push this work forward in new ways. Heartfelt thanks go to each and every one of you.

Lastly, we'd like to thank both of our "Dans." Dan Alpert has been our thinking partner and editor since the publication of the first book on

Student-Centered Coaching. He has not only supported the work but asked us tough questions to make it better. And Dan Sweeney, our project manager and Diane's husband, clears the way so we can focus on what matters most. Thank you for all you do behind the scenes.

We aren't sure where this journey will take us next, but we are excited to find out. We hope you'll join us.

About the Authors

Diane Sweeney is the co-author of *Leading Student-Centered Coaching: Building Principal and Coach Partnerships* (Sweeney & Mausbach, 2018), *Student-Centered Coaching: The Moves* (Sweeney & Harris, 2017), and author of *Student-Centered Coaching: A Guide for K–8 Coaches and Principals* (2011), and *Student-Centered Coaching at the Secondary Level* (2013). Each of these books is grounded in the simple but powerful premise that coaching can be designed to more directly impact student learning. Her first book, *Learning Along the Way* (2003), shares the story of how an urban elementary school transformed itself to become a learning community.

Diane spends her time speaking and consulting for schools and educational organizations across the country. She is also an instructor for the University of Wisconsin–Madison. When she isn't working in schools, she loves to spend time outside with her family in Denver, Colorado.

Leanna S. Harris is the co-author of *Student-Centered Coaching: The Moves* (Sweeney & Harris, 2017). She has worked as a teacher, coach, and consultant across Grades K–12 and currently works with Diane Sweeney Consulting to help schools and districts implement Student-Centered Coaching. Her work is based upon the belief that professional development for teachers is most effective when it is grounded in outcomes for student achievement—for every child, every day.

Leanna is a passionate skier and cyclist. She lives in Denver, Colorado, with her husband and three kids.

Introduction

Student-Centered Coaching: A Guide for K–8 Coaches and Principals (Sweeney) was first published in 2011. It was the result of us wondering how to ensure that coaching makes a measurable impact on teaching and learning. Almost ten years later, we hope that we've helped schools and districts answer this question.

Nearly every conversation we have about coaching reminds us of how complex, challenging, and messy it really is. It sure would be nice if we could get around that fact, but working in the field of instructional coaching for over twenty years has taught us to embrace this reality. After all, most innovation is derived from problem solving, and the problem we seek to solve is how to continue to get more out of instructional coaching.

As you read this book, you'll notice that we present a close-up view of this important work. That's because we love to be right near the action. All year long we work alongside coaches, teachers, students, and their principals to help them develop the skills and strategies that are necessary to pull this off. We believe that taking a practitioner stance allows us to learn from, and make meaning of, the work. The icing on the cake is that we then get to share what we learn with others. Like you.

Why This Book Now?

A lot has changed in education over the past decade. New standards and curriculum were adopted, the Visible Learning research has become a driving force in understanding evidence-based instructional practice, and more school districts are investing in instructional coaching. It feels like now is the time to share our newest thinking about coaching.

We view this book as the essential guide for all things Student-Centered Coaching and therefore feel it has something for everyone. Those who are new to Student-Centered Coaching will find the foundational beliefs

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and practices for the work. Those who are familiar with Student-Centered Coaching will find a lot that's new. Our goal is to provide a belief system and a look at the practices we use as well as to address aspects of the work that we haven't discussed in our other books. This includes a framework for coaching cycles, how we engage in conversations that are student-centered, insights around building a culture for coaching, and methods for supporting and evaluating coaches.

We've designed this book to accompany *Student-Centered Coaching: The Moves* (Sweeney & Harris, 2017) and *Leading Student-Centered Coaching: Building Principal and Coach Partnerships* (Sweeney & Mausbach, 2018). *Student-Centered Coaching: The Moves* serves as a how-to book and is chock-full of tools, strategies, and videos of coaching in action. It answers the question, "What does Student-Centered Coaching look like in practice?" *Leading Student-Centered Coaching* addresses the importance of building principal and coach partnerships that are aligned with school improvement processes. Without these partnerships, the impact of coaching will be diminished. Our hope is that together these books will build a comprehensive view of how to implement Student-Centered Coaching in your school or district.

Guiding Principles and Core Practices

Whenever we are working with others to implement Student-Centered Coaching, we continually come back to a set of guiding principles that serve as the philosophical underpinning for this work. These principles are at the heart of our beliefs about coaching as well as our practices, and they hold us accountable to staying "student-centered" in everything we do.

- Coaching is not about "fixing" teachers.
- Coaching is a partnership focused on student learning.
- Coaching is about continual professional growth.
- Coaching is part of a robust ecosystem of professional learning.

In addition to our guiding principles, we use seven core practices for Student-Centered Coaching. Each one is rooted in the teaching and learning cycle, and together, they address the process of a coaching cycle as well

as the importance of measuring the impact of coaching and partnering with school leadership. The core practices for Student-Centered Coaching are as follows, and they are described in more detail in Figure 1.3 in Chapter 1.

1. Utilize coaching cycles

2. Set standards-based goals

3. Unpack the goal into learning targets

4. Co-plan with student evidence

5. Co-teach using effective instructional practices

6. Measure the impact on student and teacher learning

7. Partner with the leader

The Path to Implementation of Student-Centered Coaching

As we mentioned, coaching is messy. We've learned this in our work with schools and districts across the United States and beyond. As you either think about or intentionally move toward implementation, this is a road map to follow. It doesn't mean that there won't be detours, breakdowns, or other challenges. But it does provide you with a path to make your goals for instructional coaching a reality.

The stages of implementation include prelaunch; launch; and implement, monitor, and adjust. The duration of each stage is based on the needs of the district or organization. Here is a description of the roles played by the district, school principal, and coach in each stage of implementation:

Prelaunch
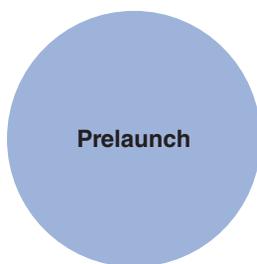
DISTRICT—Builds stakeholders' knowledge of the purpose and practices for Student-Centered Coaching. Hires a well-qualified coaching team.

PRINCIPAL—Studies the purpose and practices for Student-Centered Coaching in order to lead the effort with clarity of purpose.

COACH—Studies the purpose and practices for Student-Centered Coaching. Builds trusting and respectful relationships with teachers.

Launch
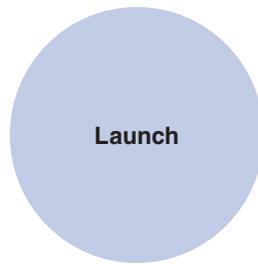
DISTRICT—Provides professional learning to the coaching team. Works with school leaders to implement Student-Centered Coaching.

PRINCIPAL—Aligns coaching with the school improvement plan. Introduces coaching to the faculty, clarifying what coaching is and isn't and addressing questions or concerns among teachers.

COACH—Partners with the principal to launch coaching cycles. Develops systems for collecting evidence of impact.

Implement, Monitor, and Adjust

DISTRICT—Collects district-level data to monitor the impact of the coaching program. Continues to provide professional learning to the coaching team and principals.

PRINCIPAL—Meets with the coach on a weekly basis. Continues to monitor the impact of coaching in relation to the school improvement plan.

COACH—Continues to implement coaching cycles and collect evidence of impact. Collaborates with the principal to maintain focus and develop coaching skills.

Coaching is a journey that we have been on for many years now. In the pages of this book you will learn about the countless mistakes we've made and lessons we've learned. As you embark upon or continue your own journey with coaching, we hope this essential guide will provide you with insights, ideas, and inspiration.

Why Student-Centered Coaching Matters

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We had a wake-up call early in our coaching work. A school on the Navajo reservation in southeastern Utah had invited us to work with their teachers on the instruction of reading comprehension. To get there, we flew ninety minutes on a sixteen-seat plane and then drove across the desert to arrive in the town of Mexican Hat. If you've ever seen the film *Thelma & Louise*, you've seen this beautiful part of the country.

On our first visit, the principal shared some assessment data that indicated that many students were performing below grade level in reading. He then led us on a tour to meet the teachers who we would be working with. As less-than-experienced coaches, we didn't think to ask how this list of teachers had been created or how they felt about being on it. Instead, we took it as our cue to go from classroom to classroom to show the teachers how it's done. We thought that if on each visit we planned, modeled, and debriefed lessons, then the teachers would continue using the practices after we left. To put it simply, we were taking a "show-and-tell" approach to professional development. We would *show* the teachers what teaching reading looked like, and we would *tell* them how they could do it. Then we'd fly home making the assumption that it would somehow make a difference for their students.

As we arrived at the school for a visit in the early spring, we learned that all of the teachers we were scheduled to work with had called in sick. Since no other teachers were ill that day, it suddenly became obvious that the problem was us. We had to face the hard reality that what we were doing wasn't working. Looking back, it's easy to see what led us astray. We thought that our role was to support teachers to implement a specific set of instructional practices, and we tackled this by showing teachers

how to teach. To the teachers it must have felt very top down, bossy, and condescending. It's no wonder they called in sick.

Experiences like this helped us shift toward our current approach to coaching. It was clear that downloading instructional strategies onto the teachers was a rookie mistake—one that we learned from the hard way.

We Don't Have Time to Waste

Our students don't go to school to participate in programs, they don't go to school to behave, and they don't go to school to score well on tests. They go to school to learn, so it only makes sense that this should be the focus of our coaching. If our ultimate goal is to increase student achievement, then coaching should be designed to do just that.

There is no shortage of school districts that are looking for more from their coaching programs. The question is how to get there. Many have had coaches without a clear plan for coaching. In these cases, nobody really knows what to expect from working with a coach. This includes teachers, school leaders, and even the coaches themselves.

It's no surprise that so many educators aren't clear about what coaching is about. In a recent review of research on instructional coaching, we were struck by how often it is described as being about improving instructional practice to ultimately impact student achievement. Teachers may wonder what this really means in their day-to-day life with students, and they may even assume that coaching is about determining what they're doing wrong and how the coach is going to "fix" them. Clearly this was the impression shared by the teachers in Mexican Hat.

This vision of coaching also implies that changing instruction will *hopefully* trickle down to improving student learning, but how would we know for sure? There is a clear argument to be made for having a highly effective teacher in every classroom (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). Yet when coaching focuses solely on improving instruction, the focus is on implementing a certain practice, strategy, or structure. When this is the case it's easy to lose sight of the real goal, which is student learning.

Student-Centered Coaching takes a different approach. Rather than just *hoping* that coaching will impact student learning, this is our focus. We ask teachers what they would like their students to learn, and then

co-plan and co-teach to get them there. In this way we not only impact student learning but we also support teachers to implement effective instructional practices along the way. This is because we co-plan lessons that are rich with the research-based instructional practices that we hope to see. This creates buy-in and relevance among teachers while also building their pedagogical skills. We don't have the luxury of focusing our coaching on instruction in isolation and then hoping that student learning will follow suit. We must design our coaching in a way that is aimed at a concrete goal for student learning and then partner with teachers on the instructional practices that will get us there.

Built on a Philosophy of Backward Design

When we were grappling with how to be more effective in our coaching, we were also studying *Understanding by Design* by Wiggins and McTighe (2005). It came together when we read, "We ask designers to start with a much more careful statement of the desired results—the priority *learnings*—and to derive the curriculum from the performances called for or implied in the goals" (p. 17). This notion of working backward from the desired results became the operating principle for Student-Centered Coaching.

With the focus on a goal for student learning, it became easier to develop partnerships with teachers. Even more importantly, the impact became measurable because the teacher and coach could formatively assess student learning every step of the way. We were also able to identify the growth that the teacher had made instructionally because it was nested in the context of teaching *and* learning.

How Student-Centered Coaching Compares With Other Approaches to Coaching

Figure 1.1 compares Student-Centered Coaching with other approaches to instructional coaching. While you may have seen a similar figure in our previous publications, we've updated it with the hope of showing how coaching can get us closer to student learning right off the bat. You'll notice that we use the language of relationship-driven, teacher-centered, and student-centered coaching in order to describe what we've seen in schools as we've supported coaching over the past few decades. This figure describes the role, focus, use of data, and other common coaching behaviors in each type of coaching.

FIGURE 1.1   Student-Centered, Teacher-Centered, and Relationship-Driven Coaching
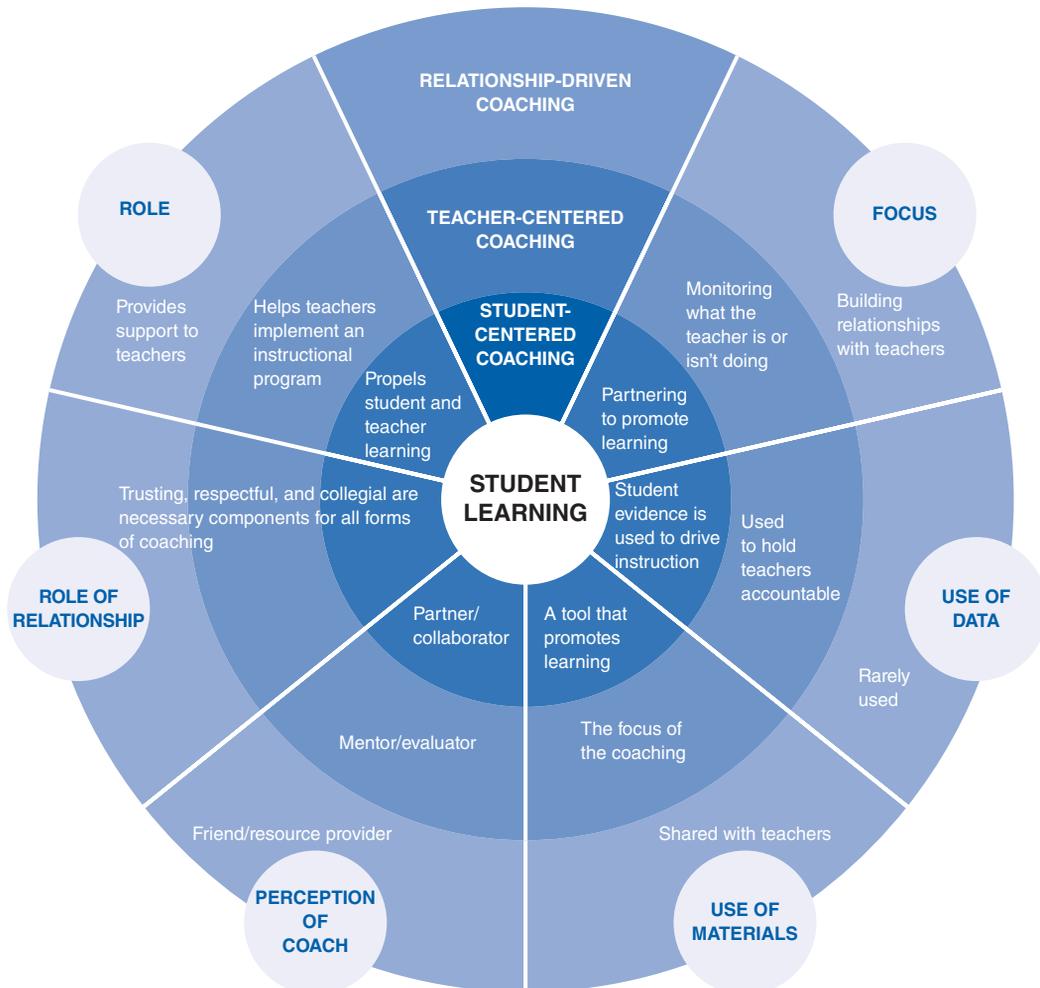
We like to think of this figure as a dartboard. When playing darts, we aim for the bullseye at the center. In this case, the center is student learning. The closer our darts are to the bullseye, the bigger our impact is on student learning. While it would be nice if we hit the center every time, we know that there are times when we may hit the outer rings. From time to time, we may serve as a resource provider or engage in some teacher-centered coaching because we are striving to be responsive to the teachers' needs. However, if we are hitting the outer rings all of the time, or if our role is defined as relationship-driven or teacher-centered coaching, then we will make far less of an impact on student learning. The objective of Student-Centered Coaching is to be aiming for the bullseye as much as possible.

Teacher Perception Matters

Understanding teacher perception is essential if we hope to successfully implement a coaching effort. The reason for this is simple: teacher perception connects directly to buy-in, trust, and willingness to engage wholeheartedly in coaching.

Teacher-centered coaching is the most challenging place to build trusting relationships with teachers. When coaches are put in the position of monitoring whether or not teachers are implementing the program or practices, they become closely affiliated with accountability. This is the role we took in our work with the teachers in Mexican Hat. They most likely viewed us as coming in and telling them what to do, which negatively impacted their perception of coaching.

Relationship-driven coaching can also negatively impact how teachers view coaching. The reason for this is it can feel unfocused or like it's a waste of time. In other words, coaching may not be taken seriously because teachers don't have time for things that are not laser-like focused on their students' achievement.

Unlike these other approaches to coaching, Student-Centered Coaching emphasizes the use of student evidence to propel student and teacher learning forward. Taking this stance leads to the perception that coaching is not only worth a teacher's time but it is beneficial to the students as well. This enables us to create partnerships far more quickly.

As you read through the different approaches to coaching, you've probably begun to reflect on what coaching looks like in your school or district. For example, do teachers see the coach merely as a resource provider? Do they steer clear of coaching because they see it as not fitting their needs? Or are they engaged because they understand the value it brings to their students' learning? Figure 1.2 provides a series of questions to gauge how coaching is perceived by the teachers in your school.

The good news is it's never too late to shift in the direction of Student-Centered Coaching—especially when we engage teachers in the process. Time and time again, we see them valuing coaching when they understand that it's about their students' learning because that's what matters most.

FIGURE 1.2   Reflecting on Teacher Perception

1. If we were to ask teachers in your school why coaching matters, what would they say?

2. What do you think has led to this perception?

3. Do coaches feel that building relationships is their ultimate goal, or is relationship-building viewed as a first step for coaching?

4. How much time do coaches spend gathering and providing resources to teachers? In what ways is this impacting how they are perceived by teachers?

5. Are coaches engaged in work that is solely focused on implementation of specific instructional practices, or is their work learning focused?

6. Are there ways to survey teachers to better understand their perceptions about coaching?

Core Practices for Student-Centered Coaching

Coaches often wonder what effective coaching looks like. Student-Centered Coaching is driven by seven core practices that are all about keeping student learning at the center of each and every conversation. This is how we ensure that we stay at the center of the bullseye. The core practices are illustrated in Figure 1.3. For more information on how to put them into action, we'd recommend our companion book, *Student-Centered Coaching: The Moves* (Sweeney & Harris, 2017).

FIGURE 1.3   Core Practices for Student-Centered Coaching

CORE PRACTICE	PURPOSE
1. Utilize coaching cycles	Coaching cycles create the conditions for a coach to make a lasting impact. If coaches work with teachers in an informal, or one-shot, basis, then the results of coaching will be diminished.
2. Set standards-based goals	We frame coaching around student learning by setting standards-based goals for coaching cycles. This not only helps teachers see the value in coaching but it also helps us ensure that we are setting high expectations for all students.
3. Unpack the goal into learning targets	Student-friendly learning targets increase instructional clarity. They serve as a success criteria for the coaching cycle and provide a mechanism for formative assessment by the teacher and self-assessment by the students.

CORE PRACTICE	PURPOSE
4. Co-plan with student evidence	Student evidence is used to drive decision-making when planning lessons. This aligns with our belief that coaching is built on a foundation of formative assessment.
5. Co-teach using effective instructional practices	Rather than modeling or observing, we advocate for coaches and teachers to build partnerships while working together in the classroom. This includes using a variety of coaching moves that increase teacher metacognition and transfer of practice.
6. Measure the impact on student and teacher learning	It is our obligation to collect data to demonstrate how teachers and students are growing across coaching cycles. Using the Results-Based Coaching Tool (RBCT) provides a way to clearly articulate our impact.
7. Partner with the school leader	Without a solid principal and coach partnership, the coach will not be able to make the desired impact. Clearly defining roles, separating coaching from evaluation, and creating systems for principal and coach collaboration build a culture for coaching.

Creating an Ecosystem for Professional Learning and Coaching

Successful coaching programs are embedded into what we like to refer to as an ecosystem for professional learning. The definition of an ecosystem is a complex network or interconnected system, which we feel expresses the kind of aligned and connected system that schools need to have for meaningful learning to take place.

When we think of coaching as an essential component of the broader system for teacher development, we avoid positioning it as one more thing that teachers have to do, but rather as something that is embedded into the existing school improvement processes (Sweeney & Mausbach, 2018). Figure 1.4 unpacks this further by demonstrating how coaching and professional learning work together to impact student and teacher learning.

You'll notice that we use the language of "the thing" to define a high-leverage strategy as the focus for school improvement—for example, implementing balanced literacy, using strategies for disciplinary literacy, building teacher clarity, or using ongoing formative assessment. The key is for "the thing" to be focused.

It's paramount to have teachers' voices in the conversation when it comes to identifying "the thing." Asking what they are experiencing in the

FIGURE 1.4   How Coaching Connects to Existing Structures for Professional Learning

Look fors that define "the thing"

← "The Thing"
i.e., balanced literacy, disciplinary literacy, teacher clarity, formative assessment

Professional Learning

PLCs, professional development, etc.

- Facilitated by teacher leaders, the coach, or administrators
- Evaluated by administrators using walk-throughs and observations

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Coaching Cycles

- Facilitated by the coach
- Evaluated through the Results-Based Coaching Tool

Source: Adapted from Sweeney & Mausbach (2018).

classroom and what they think matters most goes a long way in building a culture of learning. We even find ourselves referring to "the thing" as "the dream" because it is something that is good for the students and is agreed upon by the teachers.

Establishing Look Fors

After a focus has been identified, it's important to unpack it into a set of look fors so we can become clear about what we mean when we claim it as our focus for school improvement. Well-crafted look fors provide the specificity that the administration needs to monitor implementation. When a principal walks into a classroom with a set of look fors, the likelihood of quality feedback increases. When look fors are lacking, it is much harder for the principal to supervise and for the coach to provide support. Figure 1.5 provides an example of look fors from a middle school that was focusing on increasing teacher clarity to increase self-regulation by students.

Professional Learning

After a focus (or "the thing") and look fors have been identified, it's time to consider how the teachers will be supported. We offer two ways to

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FIGURE 1.5   Examples of Look Fors

"THE THING": INCREASING TEACHER CLARITY TO INCREASE SELF-REGULATION BY STUDENTS

Look Fors

- Teachers will embed student-friendly learning targets into each lesson.
- Students will self-assess in relation to the learning targets at least one time per lesson.
- When asked, students will be able to articulate the purpose for learning.
- Students will be grouped flexibly and in relation to the learning targets.
- Conferences with students will be guided by the learning targets.

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achieve this: professional learning and coaching cycles. Both are equally important. Professional learning includes collaboration through PLCs, learning teams, department meetings, data teams, and more traditional forms of professional development. Coaching cycles occur one-on-one, with pairs, or small groups, and they provide the opportunity for a coach to guide teachers toward implementation within their classrooms.

We recommend for professional learning to be facilitated by a broad array of leaders including teacher leaders, the coach, or the principal because this creates a culture of learning that integrates voices from across the faculty. A simple way to accomplish this is to create a leadership team that plans and delivers professional learning that relates to the focus for school improvement. For example, teachers can lead PLCs, they can provide professional learning, and they can even open up their classrooms for peer-based observations. Including a variety of voices in this conversation helps us avoid delegating professional learning to the coach, a move that doesn't acknowledge the voices, ideas, or strengths of the teachers in the school.

With a clear focus on school improvement comes the need for monitoring and supervision by the school leader. When walk-throughs are focused and include quality feedback, they can be one of the best ways to ensure that teachers are successfully implementing what is expected. By quality feedback, we mean to suggest that whenever principals spend time in a classroom, they circle back with the teacher to discuss how the teaching and learning aligned with the look fors and what might come next.

When it comes to monitoring and supervision, we keep the coaches out of it. This means they aren't engaging in walk-throughs or other forms of evaluation. Rather, they are rolling up their sleeves and supporting teachers through coaching cycles.

Coaching Cycles

Coaching cycles sit alongside professional learning and serve a different purpose. They are driven by a standards-based goal that is identified by the teachers who are involved, and they include regular co-planning and co-teaching sessions with the coach. While it is far more subtle, the look fors are a part of coaching cycles through embedded classroom-based work. For example, a coach working in a school focused on teacher clarity will find plenty of opportunities to integrate the look fors into co-planning and co-teaching sessions by asking questions such as the following: (1) What will our learning target be for the lesson? (2) What strategies do we want students to use to self-assess? (3) How will we organize small groups?

Rather than downloading information onto teachers about everything they should be doing, the coach is able to integrate it right into the planning conversations. This approach keeps the coach away from accountability while staying firmly in the role of partner and support in implementing the given practices.

Where school leaders monitor the impact of professional learning through processes like walk-throughs, coaches monitor the impact of coaching cycles using a tool we refer to as the Results-Based Coaching Tool (RBCT). This allows coaches to walk away from coaching cycles, understanding how both the teacher and students grew.

Chapter 2 provides more information about how to organize and facilitate coaching cycles, and for more on aligning coaching with school improvement processes, refer to *Leading Student-Centered Coaching: Building Principal and Coach Partnerships* (Sweeney & Mausbach, 2018).

Coaching Toward Sustainability

We often hear the question, "How can we be sure that teachers will continue to use the instructional practices after the cycle ends?" It's a fair question considering the number of resources that are put into having

coaches in a school or district. None of us want coaching to feel like the movie *Groundhog Day*; waking up and not seeing a bit of progress is clearly not what we are looking for. We experienced this when working on the Navajo reservation. Not only did the teachers avoid us but they avoided the strategies we discussed as well. What a waste of time, energy, and resources.

While we strive to see shifts in instructional practice, this question can sometimes feel loaded, as though it's the coach's job to monitor implementation. This takes coaching in an evaluative direction, which is the last place we want to be. When coaches find that the work they're doing in coaching cycles doesn't result in any changes in teaching practice, it can be a good opportunity for reflection, just as we had to do all those years ago. We can ask ourselves questions such as these:

- *Did I keep the teacher in the driver's seat, or was I coaching to my own agenda?*

- *Did I do too much of the work, taking away the learning opportunity for the teacher?*

- *Did I overwhelm the teacher with too many of my own ideas?*

- *Did I create a system that allowed for consistent co-planning and co-teaching toward a goal for student learning, or was our work haphazard and unfocused?*

We can agree that whatever we do as coaches must be sustainable. The sentiment should be that anything we do in a coaching cycle should be something that the teacher can do on his or her own once the cycle is over. This happens when the coach acts as a partner in the process rather than as a resource with short-term fixes and supports. The following strategies are designed to not only increase the level of sustainability but to increase teacher ownership as well.

Guide Teachers Toward Work That Matters

A lesson in human behavior is that we won't work hard unless we care about the work. Finding things that teachers care about begins with the goal-setting conversation. When a coach asks, "What do you want your students to know and do?" we increase teacher ownership because teachers

inherently want their students to be successful. Tapping into this powerful energy source is the engine that drives Student-Centered Coaching.

We like to borrow from the work of McTighe and Wiggins (2012), who refer to this as transfer of learning, or "the idea that engaging learners in thoughtful meaning making helps them deepen their understanding of important ideas and processes" (p. 3). This notion of transfer applies to teachers because we want what was learned to become embedded into daily practice.

One way we achieve this is to create meaningful work for both the students and teacher. We believe that meaningful work begins with framing coaching around a goal for student learning. This seems so obvious, but in our experience, it's still not common practice. Many coaching conversations focus on everything except learning—for example, how well a lesson is paced, if classroom management strategies are being used, or if the content is being covered. In contrast, if we organize coaching around a standards-based goal that the teacher cares about, then we are able to create transfer, and transfer ensures sustainability.

Take a Strengths-Based Approach With Adult Learners

While we know to avoid taking a deficit perspective toward students, why do we so often go there with teachers? It can happen in the subtlest of ways. A principal notices that behavior issues are escalating in a certain classroom, so we'd better get that teacher some coaching. Teachers are complaining that their students aren't coming to them prepared from the previous grade level. Again, let's get those teachers some coaching. Or test data is raising concerns regarding student growth and achievement. You guessed it! That teacher needs coaching.

Applying coaching through a deficit lens quickly becomes an uphill battle. Teachers figure out that coaching is about fixing them. They may feel as though they are being unfairly judged. They may resist due to feeling defensive. Or they may engage in ways that are inauthentic and have no intention of following through on anything that is discussed during the coaching sessions. This obviously goes against building sustainability.

This doesn't mean that building on strengths is a touchy-feely endeavor. Rather, it is a way to honor the work and knowledge that each teacher

brings—before we make any adjustments. We will dig deeper into taking a strengths-based approach in Chapter 4.

Connections to the Visible Learning Research

How many times have you wondered if a certain strategy or instructional practice was as effective as you hoped it would be? The good news is we have a research base to guide our decision-making as educators. *Visible Learning* was introduced by John Hattie in his groundbreaking research that was first published in 2009. As of 2019, Hattie has analyzed more than 95,000 studies, 300 million students, and 250+ influences to understand what most influences student achievement. Hattie and Zierer (2018) write, "The aim is to move from 'what works' to 'what works best' and when, for whom, and why" (p. xviii).

Visible Learning is based on the idea that our responsibility as educators is to "know thy impact." Otherwise we may be using practices, programs, or interventions that aren't working for our students. Student-Centered Coaching operates from the same premise. By never wavering to monitor our impact, we maintain a disciplined focus on how a coach and teacher are (or aren't) moving student learning forward. Then we work together to figure out where to go next.

Figure 1.6 provides a crosswalk between the practices for Student-Centered Coaching and some of the influences that have been identified in the Visible Learning research. Each Visible Learning influence includes an effect size. Effect size is a common calculation that is used in the field of educational research as it allows us to place a large number of studies and amount of meta-analysis on a common scale.

As you explore the figure, you'll notice that the influences we've identified have an effect size of greater than $d = 0.40$. This is because $d = 0.40$ is considered the "hinge point," meaning that $d = 0.40$ equates to one year's growth in learning in one year's time. For a frame of reference, the highest effect size to date is collective teacher efficacy at 1.39, and an example of a low effect size is student retention at -0.32.

Let's take a closer look at how some of these influences align with Student-Centered Coaching, beginning with the largest effect size to date: collective teacher efficacy ($d = 1.39$). Donohoo (2018) writes, "When

FIGURE 1.6   How Student-Centered Coaching Aligns With the Visible Learning Research

STUDENT-CENTERED COACHING	VISIBLE LEARNING INFLUENCES	EFFECT SIZE
Partner with teachers to achieve standards mastery	– Collective teacher efficacy – Mastery learning – Teacher expectations	$d = 1.39$ $d = 0.61$ $d = 0.43$
Co-plan and co-teach with teachers	– Clear goal intentions – Teacher clarity – Metacognitive strategies	$d = 0.48$ $d = 0.75$ $d = 0.69$
Use formative assessment practices	– Evaluation and reflection – Self-regulation strategies – Evaluation and reflection	$d = 0.75$ $d = 0.52$ $d = 0.75$
Support student engagement through quality work	– Strong classroom cohesion – Classroom management – Teacher-student relationship	$d = 0.53$ $d = 0.52$ $d = 0.48$

Source: Author created using data from Hattie (2019, June). Retrieved from https://us.corwin.com/sites/default/files/250_influences_chart_june_2019.pdf.

teachers believe that together they and their colleagues can impact student achievement, they share a sense of collective teacher efficacy. Collective efficacy is high when teachers believe that the staff is capable of helping students master complex content, fostering students' creativity, and getting students to believe they can do well in school" (p. 3). One of the most important jobs for coaches is to help teachers believe that they can have a positive impact on their students. This means we work with teachers to create a path forward through having meaningful formative assessment, co-planning high-quality lessons, and creating an overall belief that students can get there when we work together to create the proper conditions for learning.

Collective teacher efficacy connects to another important influence, mastery learning ($d = 0.61$). By helping teachers envision how to better serve all students, coaches can break down the barriers associated with low teacher expectations. This, in turn, creates schools where students are provided with the instruction that they deserve. As coaches, we aren't

satisfied until all learners have reached the goal for the coaching cycle. Sure, this may take some work, but if we don't maintain this mindset then we are making assumptions based on who we think should or shouldn't achieve. Teaching to mastery elevates expectations for all students, and it is rewarding and motivating when teachers experience this kind of success with their students.

By influencing what happens every day in the classroom, coaches and teachers design and execute lessons that are clearer to both the teacher and the students. This connects to the influence of teacher clarity ($d = 0.76$), which is almost twice the average effect size of one year of schooling. Almarode and Vandas (2018) describe teacher clarity as follows:

> When teachers are clear on what students are learning, they can better select learning experiences that specifically target the necessary learning. Similarly, when teachers know why students are learning what they are learning, they can better design learning experiences that are authentic and relevant to learners. Finally, when teachers know what success looks like, they can show learners what success looks like, design opportunities for students to make their own thinking and learning visible, give and receive feedback, and gather evidence about where to go next in the teaching and learning. (p. 5)

Because Student-Centered Coaching is designed to impact student learning, it guides teachers toward using practices that are research proven, most likely to increase student achievement, and aligned with the Visible Learning research.

Lesson From the Field

Heather had been teaching sixth-grade math for five years in a district north of Denver, Colorado. About 60 percent of the students in her school were from low-income families, and the population of nonnative English speakers had been growing rapidly each year due to a demographic shift in the neighborhood.

Due to low test scores, the district began pushing for an inquiry-based approach to mathematics. In theory, this sounded good to Heather, but somehow it just wasn't playing out in her classroom. She knew she was doing the bulk of the work during her math lessons—for example,

explaining step-by-step how to do problems and then watching kids sit helplessly waiting for her to come assist them one by one during independent practice time. When she put the students into small groups to discuss their work, she found that they would either sit silently or chat about topics completely unrelated to math. She left each day feeling exhausted from all the hard work she was doing, and yet she knew deep down that her students weren't getting it. She was on a fast track to teacher burnout.

That same year, her principal launched a cohort with the math teachers and Joy, their newly hired instructional coach. They met twice a month to read and learn more about best practices for teaching math. The expectation was that they would try new things and report back on how it was going. A few of the teachers would come back with good news to report, but mostly the group expressed frustration from not feeling successful. Some lacked confidence in the whole process and refused to even try anything in the first place.

Heather implemented a few of the things they were learning, but mainly she saw the same results: kids not engaging in the work, giving up quickly because it was "too hard," and being off task when asked to work with their peers.

A few weeks later, they gathered in the conference room as usual, but this time the principal asked Joy to take the lead. "I've been practicing some new strategies for coaching," Joy said. "Along with continuing to learn alongside you in our study group, I'd like to partner with you as you work to implement this work in your classrooms." She went on to explain the philosophy of Student-Centered Coaching and how it would enable her to work side by side with the teachers as they endeavored to change how they were teaching math. Heather, desperate for *something* to help her make it through the rest of the year, decided to go for it.

The first thing Joy did when she met with Heather was to lay the foundation for their work together. She explained that they would focus on just one of Heather's sections. They would co-plan and co-teach for that class throughout the cycle. Together they chose some specific days and times to do this each week. Joy was sure to block these days off on her calendar to be certain that Heather would be her number one priority during those times. Then she made sure Heather understood that her purpose as a

coach was to partner to help her students learn, *not* to teach and evaluate Heather on how to best teach math. They would set a goal for student learning, and everything they did would revolve around that goal.

Over the next six weeks, Heather and Joy did the work of teaching together. They set a goal for her third-period class: Students will understand and use ratios in order to make sense of real-world situations based on standards and their district math curriculum. They created a set of learning targets to guide their work with students, and they pre-assessed the students with an open-ended math task called the Ticket Booth Problem (see Figure 1.7).

Heather had never been much of a believer in pre-assessing because in the past when she'd given her students a bunch of problems to solve before she had taught them how to do the math, they mostly just left the whole thing blank. When Joy brought a more accessible and meaningful option to the table, Heather began to appreciate her as a resource. Not

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FIGURE 1.7   Ticket Booth Problem From a Sixth-Grade Unit of Ratios and Proportions

A school carnival ticket booth posts the following sign:

TICKET BOOTH

1 Ticket For $.50

12 Tickets For $5.00

25 Tickets For $10.00

50 Tickets For $25.00

120 Tickets For $50.00

HAVE FUN!

1. Which number of tickets offers the best deal? Explain your thinking.

2. How would you suggest the students running the ticket booth modify the list of prices?

surprisingly, none of the students were able to demonstrate proficiency, but all of them were able to attempt to solve the problem, giving Heather and Joy valuable insight into what they were already bringing to the table as mathematicians.

As the pair began to co-plan and co-teach after collecting their baseline data, it was slow going for the first few weeks. Joy would persistently ask Heather questions during their planning. Mostly this was focused on helping the students think intentionally about what they needed to do: What is the specific learning target for this lesson? How will we unpack it to make sure kids know what's expected of them? What do they need at the beginning of the lesson to make sure they can be successful when working independently or in groups? What misconceptions might we expect to see? As they thought through all of these questions, they referred to the learning they'd been doing in their math cohort for guidance on how to make it all happen. Heather felt exhausted and overwhelmed at first, but the changes she was starting to see in her classroom gave her the energy to keep going.

Throughout the process, Joy worked hard to keep asking thoughtful questions and to help break down all the possibilities with Heather to be able to anticipate what would happen during the lesson. Most importantly, she kept the focus on the students and how they were doing toward meeting the goal. Heather felt this was key in making the process feel safe and supportive. Knowing that Joy would be with her on those set times each week kept her accountable to do what they said they would do, and at the same time it felt easier to take risks and try new things, knowing she was not going through it alone.

By the end of the coaching cycle, Heather was a different teacher, and her class was a different place. She was still working hard, but she was much more focused on *what* she was saying versus *how much* she was saying and doing for the kids. Her students were doing the bulk of the heavy lifting in class, including working with each other to struggle through hard problems, justifying their thinking, and persevering. Heather was taking all the great learning she did with Joy and applying it to her teaching and planning in her other sections. Across the board she was seeing great results, and for the first time in a long time she was enjoying teaching.

Tools and Techniques

While we've worked for years supporting the development of coaches, we've learned that they can't do it alone. In addition to having a skilled coach, Student-Centered Coaching requires a principal who understands the rationale and practices for this type of coaching and articulates with confidence how it positively impacts student learning. This process of articulation hinges on creating a plan for defining what Student-Centered Coaching means for both the teachers and students.

Being savvy regarding the messaging around coaching may feel like the principal is being asked to serve as a cheerleader for the work. It's a whole lot like marketing a product. Teachers have to believe in coaching, and if they sense even the smallest lack of support by the principal, then some may take that as an excuse to remain on the sidelines. The steps in Figure 1.8 walk us through how to build excitement around coaching. These are presented in an intentional order because starting with the *why* is how we begin to win the hearts and minds of teachers.

As we develop our own vision for coaching, a next step is to help others understand it as well. Let's not underestimate the fact that in most schools, coaching is either relationship driven or teacher-centered. For this reason, it may take some time to support teachers (and school leaders) to understand what it's all about. Figure 1.9 provides language to get us there.

FIGURE 1.8 Steps to Build Excitement Around Coaching

1. **Define why coaching matters**. *Articulate why teachers should care.*

2. **Communicate how coaching aligns with other district initiatives**. *Make sure teachers understand that coaching isn't one more thing.*

3. **Share the coach's role and how it folds into the plan for school improvement**. *Help teachers see the coach as inherent to the school's success.*

4. **Describe the expectations for teacher participation in coaching**. *Identify what participation looks like and how much time it will take.*

5. **Outline how teachers will be provided with choice and ownership in the coaching process**. *Make coaching about more than compliance.*

The if/then charts at the end of each chapter can also be found in Resource A in this book.

FIGURE 1.9 Language for Making a Shift to Student-Centered Coaching	
IF I HEAR . . .	**THEN I CAN USE THE FOLLOWING LANGUAGE . . .**
"I don't see any need to do a whole coaching cycle right now. Can you just help me with a few ideas for my upcoming unit?"	"I am happy to brainstorm some ideas with you, but I believe we can have a much bigger impact if we could partner throughout the whole unit. That way we can try different things along the way and make adjustments based on how the students are responding."
"I feel pretty good with the new math program, so I don't think you need to come in and give me any help with it."	"I'm glad to hear you're feeling good about the new program. My job as a coach is not to be the 'implementation enforcer' but rather to partner with teachers on their goals for student learning. What would you think about trying a coaching cycle with me to see how different this approach to coaching feels?"
A principal says, "I have some serious concerns about Mr. Seltzer's classroom management. With all of my other duties, I really need you to get in there and help him get on the right track."	"While I realize that you have some concerns, I wonder if we can take another approach to this. If I go in to work with Mr. Seltzer uninvited, I will be seen as a 'fixer,' which will undermine all the hard work we've done to create a positive culture around coaching. If you were to express your concerns to him and then suggest he seek out working with me for support, I think it will go a long way in keeping me away from the role of supervisor."

A Final Thought

This chapter makes the case for why Student-Centered Coaching matters. It also brings forth the level of intentionality that is required to implement a successful coaching program. No longer does coaching have to be something that teachers endure. No longer does it have to feel like a hammer that is there to ensure they are stepping in line.

Making this shift may be easier than you think. Will coaches need support from their principal and district? Sure. Will they need a clearly defined role? Definitely. And will they need to see the value in this work? Absolutely. With these pieces in place, it's never too late to make coaching about both student *and* teacher learning. Let's switch it up so that teachers clamor for, rather than avoid, this precious resource. We will always be reminded that this is messy work. We like to think of it as joyfully messy because the complexity of designing and implementing a coaching model is rich with opportunity, growth, and renewal.