

## Chapter 4 – Preparing Mentor Teachers as Collaborative Coaches

### from *Mentoring New Teachers Through Collaborative Coaching: Linking Teacher and Student Learning*

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chapterFOUR

# Preparing Mentor Teachers as Collaborative Coaches



*Dancers have mirrors. Where are our mirrors? The light in the eyes of the students is not enough.*

– Pat Wolfe (in Hill and Hawk, 1999)

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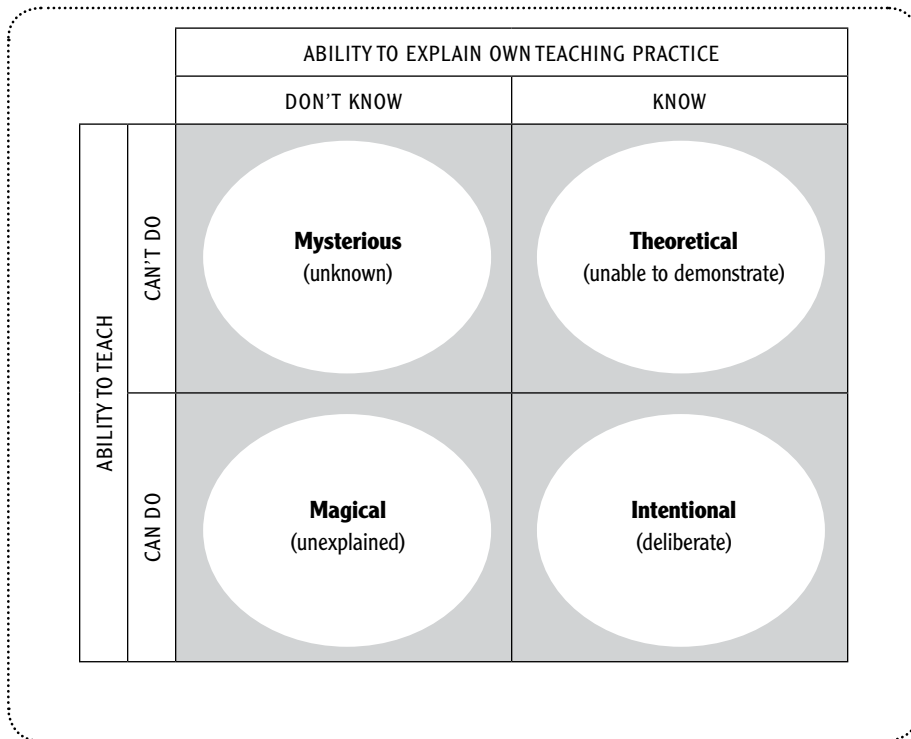
When teachers, like dancers, have the necessary mirrors, they are able to check actual performance against their intended plan and are able to better understand where and when to make adjustments. Mentors can provide “mirrors” for new teachers through collaborative coaching and other practices that support reflection. This chapter introduces the collaborative coaching cycle — the lesson planning conversation, coaching observation and gathering of data, and the reflecting conversation — that mentors use to provide new teachers with opportunities to become increasingly intentional about their instruction.

## **The Intentional Teacher**

When mentors act as collaborative coaches, they support new teachers to become intentional in their practice, to develop and combine a deep understanding of instructional theory with skillful implementation. Figure 4.1 depicts what is involved in being intentional about instruction.



**FIGURE 4.1: THE WINDOW INTO TEACHER THINKING**



Note. From *Mentoring: A Resource and Training Guide for Educators*, by A. Newton et al., 1994, San Francisco: WestEd. Copyright 1994 by WestEd. Adapted with permission.

For teachers who do not understand or have the ability to perform a specific aspect of teaching, the teaching is *mysterious* (unknown).

When teachers can understand or explain a specific instructional strategy, but lack the ability to perform it, their understanding is *theoretical* (unable to demonstrate). For instance, teachers may be able to explain what an inquiry lesson should be like but cannot implement such a lesson.

Conversely, when teachers are able to teach in a particular way (even masterfully), but are unable to articulate their reasons for why they do so, we refer to this situation as *magical* (unexplained). Such teachers operate on intuition or may not remember what they figured



out a long time ago. They may explain their practice in words such as, “I’ve been teaching for 25 years. I just teach.”

When teachers know what they are teaching, why they are teaching it in particular ways for particular groups of students, what they would do differently (or keep) the next time and why, these teachers are *intentional* (deliberate) about their practice.

Effective mentors are deliberate in their use of various coaching approaches to enhance new teachers’ intentionality and help them move toward becoming excellent teachers. Mentors consciously match their coaching approaches to the specific needs of new teachers for structure, direction, or guidance. They may employ a nondirective, a collaborative, or a direct informational approach when working with new teachers. The nondirective approach is most suited to helping new teachers “self-coach,” but mentors must draw on all three approaches and choose the most appropriate for a given situation.

## CONSIDER THIS:

As instructional leaders, mentors use focused reflection on lesson planning, implementation, and student assessment to coach new teachers in becoming more intentional about their practice. Teachers who are intentional about their practice know what they did, why they did it, what they would do differently (or keep) the next time, and why.

### **Norms of Collaboration: Essential Skills for Collaborative Dialogue**

Whether engaging in conversations about new teachers’ planning of a lesson, discussing the observation data in reflecting conversations, or interacting during more informal encounters, certain norms of collaboration (Garmston & Wellman, 2002) assure effective communication between mentors and new teachers. These norms, described in figure 4.2, are skills that most educators have and apply on a daily basis. To carry out effective dialogue, mentors and new teachers need to use these skills consistently and consciously, so that they become norms of behavior even when circumstances are less than ideal or when their “buttons are pushed.”



## FIGURE 4.2: THE SEVEN NORMS OF COLLABORATION

### **Pausing**

Pausing before responding or asking a question allows time for thinking and enhances dialogue, discussion, and decision-making.

### **Paraphrasing**

Using a paraphrase starter that is comfortable for you — “So...” or “As you are saying...” or “You are thinking...” — and following the starter with a paraphrase lets the new teacher know that you understand and/or are seeking to further understand what he or she is really saying.

### **Probing**

Using gentle, open-ended probes or inquiries, such as “Please say more...” or “I’m curious about...” or “I’d like to hear more about that...” increases the clarity and precision of the new teacher’s thinking.

### **Putting ideas on the table**

Ideas are at the heart of meaningful dialogue. Label the intention of your comments. For example, you might say, “Here is one idea...” or “One thought I have is...” or “Here is a possible approach...” This norm also includes knowing when to take ideas off the table.

### **Paying attention to self and others**

Meaningful dialogue between a mentor and a new teacher is facilitated when the speaker is aware not only of what she or he is saying but also of how it is said and how the listener is responding. This norm includes paying attention to learning style when planning for and engaging in conversations.

### **Presuming positive intentions**

Assuming that the other partner’s intentions are positive promotes trust and meaningful dialogue. Statements that might otherwise be perceived as put-downs are discounted and the focus remains on communication about ideas. Using positive intentions in one’s speech is a manifestation of this norm.

### **Pursuing a balance between advocacy and inquiry**

All of the other norms can be used in service of this foundational norm. Pursuing and maintaining a balance between advocating for a position and inquiring into one’s own and others’ positions positively impacts the learning and collegiality of the mentoring partnership.

*Note.* From *The Adaptive School: Developing and Facilitating Collaborative Groups Syllabus*, by R. Garmston and B. Wellman, 2002, El Dorado Hills, CA: Center for Adaptive Schools. Copyright 2002 by Center for Adaptive Schools: <http://www.adaptiveschools.com>. Adapted with permission.

The seven norms of collaboration promote the skills of active listening. A teacher who is actively listening uses appropriate silence and wait time, demonstrates congruent body



language, and acknowledges what the other person is saying by paraphrasing, summarizing, interpreting, or inferring.

An important aspect of active listening is to ask follow-up questions that probe for specificity. Probing for specificity can be especially valuable during a planning conversation. The mentor must not assume that a new teacher's initial responses will adequately answer the mentor's questions about the lesson. For example, when asked to identify the objective of the lesson, a new teacher might respond, "To teach multiplication." Other than knowing that the lesson will focus on mathematical multiplication, there is no clarity about the teacher's objective. Figure 4.3 demonstrates how a mentor might probe further. Through cycles of pausing, paraphrasing, and asking probing questions, the mentor can assist the new teacher in thinking through and identifying the specific objective of the lesson. The mentor's questions also prompt the new teacher to begin to talk and think about how the new teacher would know that the students "got it."

**FIGURE 4.3: PROBING FOR SPECIFICITY: AN EXAMPLE**

**Mentor:** What is the objective of this lesson you are planning?

**New Teacher:** To teach multiplication.

**Mentor:** What will you teach about multiplication?

**New Teacher:** Well, we've been working with multiplying two- and three-digit numbers. Some of the students are having difficulty in working the algorithm.

**Mentor:** How are you thinking of addressing that?

**New Teacher:** I thought I would provide some examples of area models using graph paper so that they could deconstruct and reconstruct the numbers they are multiplying. I think if they can see that  $35 \times 25$  can also be described as  $(30 \times 20) + (30 \times 5) + (5 \times 20) + (5 \times 5)$ , it might help them to better understand how to work the algorithm.

**Mentor:** So, you want to help students concretely visualize the operation of multiplication by separating place value?

**New Teacher:** Exactly.

**Mentor:** How will you know that they have increased their understanding?

**New Teacher:** Well, I will ask them to create several area models on graph paper as well as to work the examples using the standard algorithm, and then I will collect and review their work.



Active listening is a skill that many teachers do quite well. Yet even when people want to be fully present as listeners, they may experience a tendency toward “ego speak” — responding to an experience that someone else is recounting by recalling a similar personal experience. Ego speakers cannot wait until the other person is finished so that they can share: “Well, that’s interesting, but wait until you hear what happened to me....” Of course, it can be appropriate at times for the mentor to tell stories that are informative to the new teacher, but the tendency toward ego speak becomes a problem whenever the story-telling shifts the focus too much onto the mentor and interferes with the new teacher’s own reflective thought.

## CONSIDER THIS

**A good rule of thumb is to ask oneself, “Am I telling this story because it will be helpful to the listener or because I have a need to tell it?”**

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Ego speak can be especially problematic when someone of greater experience is assisting someone of lesser experience. The temptation to succumb to ego speak is hard to fight when the more experienced person, out of deep caring and concern, wants to “fix the problem.” However, jumping in rather than pausing is a lost opportunity for the mentor to allow the brilliance of the new teacher to shine through.

### **The Collaborative Coach**

By employing skills of active listening and the norms of collaboration, mentors act as instructional leaders and hold up mirrors for new teachers through continuous cycles of collaborative coaching.

Promoting colleagues’ reflection on their practice is the greatest gift mentors can give. In the words of one observer,

[Reflection is] an active process of witnessing one’s own experience in order to take a closer look at it, sometimes to direct attention to it briefly, but often to explore it in greater depth.... In the world of work, there are enormous opportunities to learn, yet relatively few structures that support learning from experience. (Amulya, 2003)



Mentoring programs for new teachers have the potential to provide such a structure by institutionalizing the practice of reflection. Reflection, as a process of inquiry, is how mentors facilitate thought and growth, both for the new teachers and for themselves. To promote productive reflection for new teachers, mentors must learn to be effective at collaborative coaching. Mentors are chosen because they are excellent teachers with the disposition to support the learning of others — peers as well as students. Being an excellent teacher is different from being a collaborative coach for new teachers.

To coach is to meet colleagues where they are and explicitly support them in achieving the goals they set for themselves. Effective coaching of new teachers depends on mentors having positive presuppositions about them. First of all, mentors must believe that new teachers want to do a good job. Mentors also must assume that new teachers have the capacity to identify their challenges and to grow. Finally, mentors must trust in new teachers' willingness to engage in supportive reflection about their practice.

As collaborative coaches, mentors promote reflection about specific aspects of lessons as well as about larger issues of pedagogy and curriculum. By gathering data that new teachers request, mentors help new teachers consider objective evidence about their effectiveness with students and enable them thereby to make more informed decisions about their practice.

As adult learners, new teachers require opportunities to make sense of new knowledge, skills, and experience through their own eyes and through their own reflection. Collaborative coaches guide rather than direct new teachers toward focused reflection on their teaching practice. Through this process of guided reflection on practice, new teachers deepen their ability to be intentional in their teaching. No amount of telling on the part of the coach can substitute for the value and essential nature of self-discovery by the new teacher.

### **The Collaborative Coaching Model**

The collaborative view of coaching incorporates the thinking, research, and practice of several others over the years, especially with regard to promoting reflection and providing feedback to new teachers (Costa & Garmston, 2002; Glickman, 2002; Saphier & Gower, 1997; Acheson & Gall, 1987; Hunter, 1982; Goldhammer, Anderson, & Krajewski, 1980).

The collaborative coaching model presented here builds from the groundbreaking work of Art Costa and Robert Garmston and their development and subsequent enhancements of Cognitive Coaching.<sup>SM</sup> The Cognitive Coaching<sup>SM</sup> approach focuses on applying specific

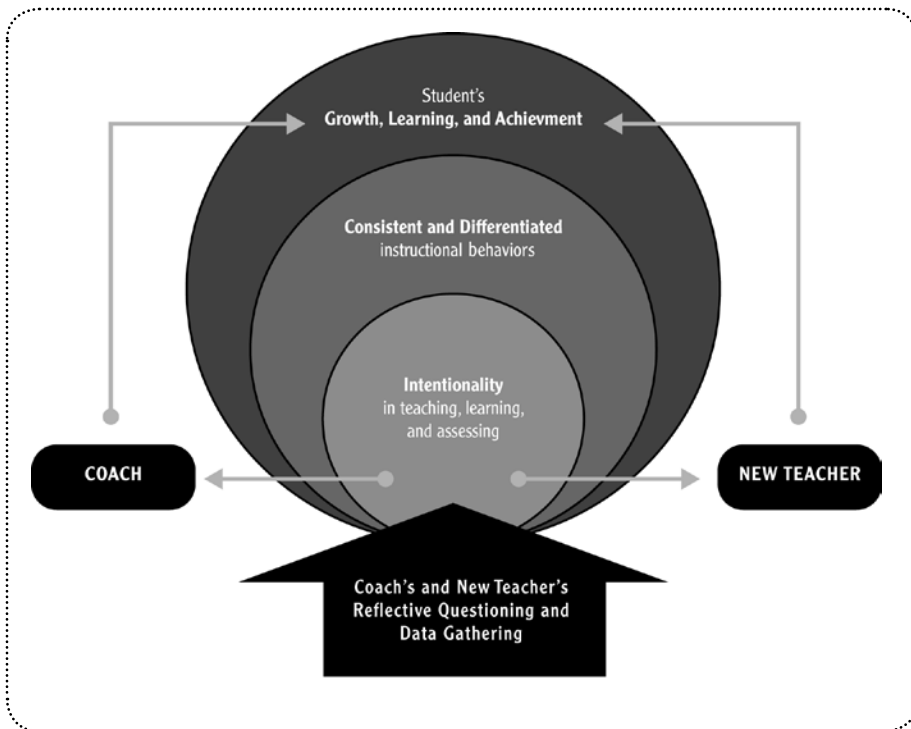




coaching strategies in order to mediate teacher thinking in ways that lead to explicit and overt changes in teaching practice that are known to create greater student learning and achievement. Shifts in teacher thinking and behavior are facilitated by repeated cycles of planning, coaching observation and data gathering, and reflecting (Costa & Garmston, 2002).

Additionally, the collaborative coaching model includes the dimensions of mutual reflection on teaching practice and an explicit emphasis on intentionality for new teachers and mentors alike. Through ongoing collaborative dialogue, mentor and new teacher pairs engage in meta-reflection and analysis of their practice. (See figure 4.4 for a graphic representation of the collaborative coaching model.)

**FIGURE 4.4: A COLLABORATIVE COACHING MODEL**



Even though mentors are primarily focused on supporting new teachers to become more intentional in their practice, by engaging in multiple cycles of planning and reflecting conversations about new teachers' practice mentors naturally reflect on their own practice as well. Often this opportunity to have conversations about new teachers' practice contributes to mentors' shift from *magical* (unexplained) teaching — being able to teach, even masterfully, without the ability to explain their teaching — to a place of intentionality, from which mentors can consistently and explicitly explain the reasoning for their teaching behaviors and decision-making. When mentors display masterful teaching without the ability to explain why they do what they do, new teachers can interpret the mentors' teaching ability as “magic” and may feel as though they could never reach the same level of mastery. On the other hand, when mentors are able to explain the reasons for their teaching decisions, new teachers are able to see clear connections between teaching behaviors and the impact of those behaviors on students. This, in turn, helps new teachers become more intentional in their teaching.

As mentor and new teacher pairs become comfortable in the collaborative coaching cycle, it may be possible to make videotaped recordings of planning conversations, classroom lessons, and reflective conversations for focused use in a study group with other mentors. The opportunity to reflect on coaching allows mentors to “think about their thinking” as coaches, just as the coaching process affords them with an opportunity to “think about their thinking” as teachers. When mentors have the opportunity to reflect on their coaching in these ways, they are able to increase their intentional use of coaching approaches and behaviors.

## CONSIDER THIS

**When videotaping classroom lessons, it is essential to secure signed permission from parents or guardians of the children who are in the classroom being videotaped. Most schools secure such permission as standard procedure and have forms to use for this purpose. In any case, prior to videotaping any classroom make sure that signed permissions have been obtained for each child.**

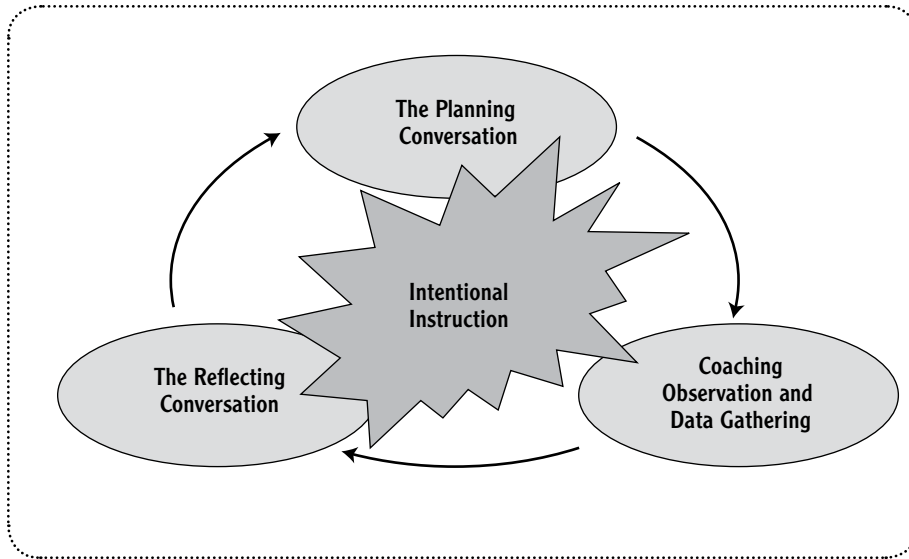
### The Collaborative Coaching Cycle

The three phases in the coaching cycle — the planning conversation, coaching observation and data gathering, and the reflecting conversation — all have the ultimate goal of enhancing intentional instruction. Figure 4.5 illustrates these relationships.



The collaborative coaching process is intended to be iterative, occurring again and again during the mentor-new teacher relationship. It would be optimal to have a coaching cycle every month. If this is not possible, we recommend that each mentoring partnership undertake at least four coaching cycles per year.

**FIGURE 4.5: THE COACHING CYCLE**



### ***The Planning Conversation***

All phases of the coaching cycle are important, but an effective planning conversation is essential for maximizing the help coaches can provide. In a planning conversation, the mentor asks the new teacher to go through a trial run of exactly what will be taught to the students and what the teacher expects students will learn. By asking effective questions, the mentor facilitates a process through which the new teacher will have already taught the lesson, in a sense, before ever entering the classroom. Even if the mentor never observes the lesson, the new teacher may have thought through potential obstacles and made adjustments ahead of time because of a planning conversation that was done well.



## CONSIDER THIS:

**We have often heard mentors say they did not have time for the entire coaching cycle. So they opted to observe a lesson without the benefit of having had a planning conversation. We urge mentors to resist the temptation to skip a planning conversation before a coaching observation. If observers do not have the opportunity to understand new teachers' intentions for their lessons, then the observations will be based on the observers' own inferences, judgments, and opinions. This kind of subjective data is of little use when the goal is to support new teachers to reflect on their teaching based upon their goals and objective data.**

In a planning conversation, the main challenge for mentors is to assist new teachers to make explicit their intentions for the lesson. New teachers must be able to articulate how they will know that each student “gets it.” Additionally, they need to verbalize the relationship between teaching behavior, expected student behavior, lesson objectives, and desired outcomes.

Mentors can meet this challenge by including particular components in each planning conversation. Specifically, effective planning conversations provide opportunities for new teachers to refine and rehearse a lesson, including to accomplish the following:

- clarify goals and objectives;
- identify what they will teach and how they will teach it;
- determine routines, procedures, and materials management;
- determine what evidence will let them know that students understand and are learning;
- decide what types of data will be useful to have for reflecting upon the lesson afterward; and
- run through the lesson once before actually teaching it to their students.

Mentors can use specific questions to probe any of these areas. The list in figure 4.6 provides a number of examples.

## CONSIDER THIS

**A mentor probably would not use all of the questions in figure 4.6 during a planning conversation. However, these are meant to provide some ideas to guide the conversation. Additionally, mentors and new teachers may work together to develop other questions they find more instructive.**



**FIGURE 4.6: POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR THE PLANNING CONVERSATION**

**Questions to clarify goals**

- What are you planning to teach?
- What do you want students to know and be able to do as a result of this lesson?
- Which curriculum standard(s) does this lesson address?
- How does this fit with what you have been doing recently with your students?

**Questions to identify what will be taught and how it will be taught**

- What specifically will you be introducing/reviewing with the students? How will you do that?
- Do any of your students have special needs? If so, how will you accommodate them?
- What, if any, modifications do you need to make for your students? How will you provide for those accommodations?
- What will I see when I observe the beginning of the lesson? The middle? The end?
- What will you be doing?
- What will the students be doing?
- What is the most crucial ingredient for this lesson to be successful?
- What, if any, concerns do you have? How will you address them?

**Questions on routines, procedures, and materials management**

- How many students do you have?
- How will the students be organized — for example, individually? In groups?
- What are the benefits of organizing the students in this way?
- How long is the lesson?
- What, if any, materials will the students be using? How will you distribute them?

**Questions on evidence of student understanding and learning**

- How will you know if students have learned what you want them to know and be able to do?
- What specific evidence are you looking for?
- How will you be assessing this lesson?
- In the future, how will you assess learning in this lesson — for example, as it relates to other lessons in the unit?



**Questions regarding what data will be most useful to reflect upon**

- What would you like me to pay attention to?
- What kind of information would be most useful for you to reflect upon after the lesson?
- What way of recording that information would be most useful to you?

**Reminder for the new teacher**

- Remember that if you need to change anything for the benefit of the students, feel free to do so. That is a natural part of teaching.

Mentors often share questions such as those in figure 4.6 with new teachers prior to the planning conversation so that they may be prepared to answer them. Providing sample questions ahead of time helps new teachers think about lesson planning and implementation even before the planning conversation. As a result, they are better prepared and may begin to integrate these questions in their planning of other lessons.

When arranging a time and place for the planning conversation, it is important to think about issues of privacy, potential interruptions, and other distractions. The following guidelines apply:

- Plan enough time for the conversation (30–45 minutes at first; eventually 15–20 minutes is usually adequate).
- Choose a place where there will be no interruptions or other distractions.
- In case distractions do occur, except for issues of safety or other emergencies, make it clear that the planning conversation is a priority and do not allow the interruption to take precedence.

While the classroom is often the most convenient place to conduct a planning conversation, it may be that students typically come into the classroom for extra help during the time scheduled for the planning conversation. Such interruptions will be distracting to the new teacher and create a difficult situation for candid dialogue and reflection. Likewise, conducting a planning (or reflecting) conversation in the faculty lounge, when other colleagues may be coming in or out, is also inappropriate. In addition to the distraction of such interruptions, discussions that indicate uncertainty about a plan or concern about



something that may not have succeeded are in many school contexts viewed not as inquiry but as evidence of poor teaching. To avoid putting a new teacher in an uncomfortable position in front of colleagues, which could also compromise the mentor and new teacher relationship, it is essential that planning and reflecting conversations be held in a private location that assures confidentiality.

As a backdrop to the planning conversation, the mentor must understand a variety of teaching strategies and when and why they are useful. During the planning conversation, the mentor and new teacher prepare for the mentor to observe the new teacher's classroom. Together they need to agree upon the focus of the mentor's observation, what type of data will be gathered, and what method the mentor will use to gather the requested data. It is very likely that new teachers will not know what data are important to collect for a particular focus. The mentor may need to probe with follow-up questions to get at this information. Often, because new teachers lack experience with data gathering techniques and uses, the mentor may need to suggest which data will give the new teacher feedback about her or his area of interest or concern.

Following the planning conversation, the mentor should have a clear picture of what and how the new teacher intends to teach, any particular focus the new teacher may have (for example, what she or he wants the mentor to look for during the observation), and what method of data gathering to use during the observation.

## CONSIDER THIS

**When gathering observation data, it is very important that the mentor literally record whatever data are agreed upon in the planning conversation. Sticking to the plan of gathering data only and exactly as agreed upon validates the importance and relevance of the planning conversation and builds trust and rapport between the mentor and new teacher.**

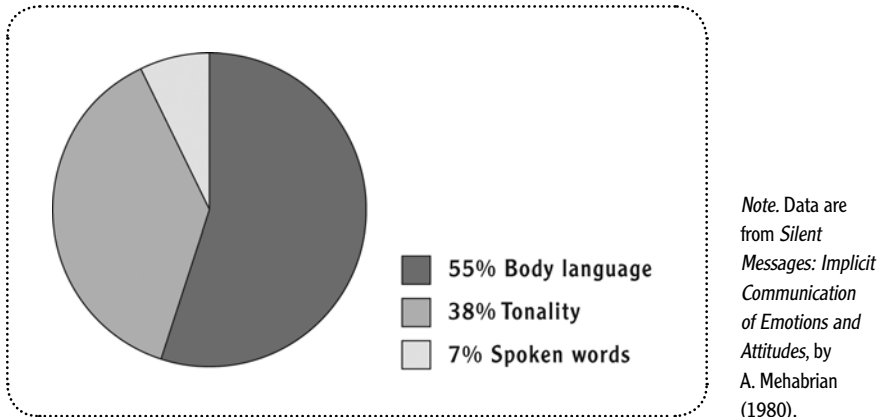
### *Coaching Observation and Data Gathering*

Having prepared ahead of time with the new teacher, the mentor observes in the new teacher's classroom and gathers data that will be used as a basis for promoting the new teacher's reflection on his or her teaching practices. When mentors share data in an objective fashion, new teachers are able to look into a "mirror" that reflects certain aspects of what really transpired during their lessons. With data as the starting point for a conversation, no judgment is implied and no excuses need to be offered. The data are there for consideration.



Being able to share data objectively is an acquired skill. Mentors need to be aware of potential pitfalls. For example, they may convey opinions about the new teacher's classroom in more ways than through spoken language. Nonverbal communication can speak volumes. Body language, tone of voice, or facial expression can instantly unveil subjective judgments (see figure 4.7).

**FIGURE 4.7: HOW SPEAKERS CONVEY THEIR MESSAGES**



A mentor's observations in the new teacher's classroom may vary in length. However, a 10- to 15-minute observation is probably too short for the purpose of gathering useful data for the new teacher. When deciding how long a coaching observation should be, the mentor must always consider the verbal contract that was created during the planning conversation. Once the new teacher describes the lesson, outcomes, and objectives, the mentor has essentially "contracted" to observe the entire lesson. Mentors who leave the coaching observation prematurely can send a message of disapproval, indicating that the mentor saw something wrong or that the lesson was not really important. On the other hand, if the lesson is expected to be particularly long and the mentor knows that it will not be possible to stay the entire time, the mentor and new teacher need to agree during the planning conversation on when the mentor will leave.

Throughout the year, the mentor and new teacher will observe each other several times. How many coaching observations are enough will vary depending upon the specific needs of a new teacher. As noted, four formal coaching cycles are a minimum to support a new teacher's growth and reflection, but if a new teacher is struggling, additional coaching cycles may be necessary. And mentors and their partners may be in and out of each other's classrooms many times during the year for much shorter, less formal visits.





There are numerous methods of data gathering. Five of the most common and useful options include verbal flow, class traffic, selective verbatim, scripting, and audio or video recording.

**Verbal Flow.** In this technique, the observer records on a seating plan the number of teacher responses and questions to the whole class and to particular students, the number of responses per student, which students are being responded to by the teacher, and which students are talking to which other students.

This technique can provide useful data when new teachers want to know which students are involved in the lesson: which students they respond to and how often, whether they are responding to girls and boys equally or excluding any other group, or when they are concerned about any particular students.

**Class Traffic.** In this method, the observer uses a sketch of the classroom, including a labeled seating arrangement, to record where the teacher and students move during a lesson. With practice and experience, the class traffic technique can be used in conjunction with the Verbal Flow method described above.

The class traffic method is useful when the teacher is interested in data about his or her interactions with individual students or groups or to provide data that can help answer concerns about whether the teaching is directed more to one side of the room than the other, for example, or whether the teacher is connecting with all of the students during a lesson.

**Selective Verbatim.** In this technique, the observer records verbatim anything said by the teacher and students within a particular category. The category of verbal responses to be recorded is predetermined by the mentor and new teacher. For example, the new teacher may be interested in what type of questions she or he asks. The mentor would then record verbatim all of the questions that the new teacher asks. In another instance, the new teacher may be interested in knowing whether she or he favors one group over another with higher-level questions. In this case, the teacher could review the verbatim record of all questions to determine the distribution by group of higher-level questions. The teacher may want to know whether she or he is clear when giving directions; a transcript could reveal much about the new teacher's direction-giving exchanges with students.

This technique provides useful data if new teachers are interested in thinking about their questioning or direction-giving techniques, levels of student thinking, or amount of teacher talk.



**Scripting.** Scripting is a verbatim record of what was said by whom during a lesson. While data gathered by this method are extremely useful in providing an exact and objective account of what happened during a lesson, observers generally need several practice sessions before they are comfortable using this technique. The scripting method requires a very focused observer. However, its benefits are as great as the intensity of effort required to gather data in this way.

This technique can be used for whatever a teacher may want to know about what happened during the lesson, with the exception of class traffic patterns. After using the scripting technique to gather data, the mentor can ask the new teacher what he or she recalls thinking about when asking a certain question or when a particular student gave a specific response.

## CONSIDER THIS

The task of recording data while observing a new teacher's classroom is demanding and requires an intense level of focus. Mentors often find that using a laptop computer to record agreed-upon data increases accuracy and speed.

**Audio or Video Recording.** Recordings can be used to gather data in response to anything the new teacher may be concerned about or interested in knowing — to record, for example, a particular part or aspect of a lesson, what is happening in the entire classroom during a lesson, or interactions between the teacher and a particular student or group of students. Recordings can also capture the behavior of students not involved with the teacher during a certain part of the lesson.

It is very important for mentors to consider the potentially intimidating nature of audio or video recording. Many new teachers may not be comfortable having someone record their lessons, particularly at the beginning of the school year or when they have not had previous experience with these data gathering methods. Often the mentor can help ease concerns by making it clear that the recording immediately becomes the property of the new teacher and will be shared with the mentor or other colleagues only if the recorded teacher so decides.

Alternatively, the mentor may suggest that the new teacher record his or her own lessons solely for personal viewing or listening, thereby allowing the new teacher to keep the data private. The mentor can give the new teacher a data gathering sheet with an explanation of how to use it and then let the new teacher practice. If new teachers are nervous about being observed or having



their lesson recorded, this approach can often help curb that anxiety. Ultimately, it is the choice of the new teacher whether or not to be videotaped or audiotaped by the mentor teacher.

Figure 4.8 provides an overview of these strategies and when to use them.

**FIGURE 4.8: CLASSROOM DATA GATHERING STRATEGIES**

<b>When looking for...</b>	<b>Use the following strategy</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involvement of students in the lesson</li> <li>• What is happening with a certain group of students</li> <li>• Gender or other bias (which students are called on, how often, in what order)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Verbal Flow</b> The observer records who talks to whom (e.g., which students the teacher calls on and how often, which students talk to which other students).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individualized instruction</li> <li>• Teacher connection to students throughout a lesson</li> <li>• Teacher proximity to students</li> <li>• Student behavior</li> </ul>	<p><b>Class Traffic</b> The observer tracks the movement of the teacher around the classroom and identifies (by numbering the interactions) which students or groups the teacher interacts with.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students' level of thinking</li> <li>• Amount of teacher talk</li> <li>• What is happening with a certain group of students</li> <li>• Types of questions the teacher asks</li> </ul>	<p><b>Selective Verbatim</b> The observer makes a written record of exactly what is said within a predetermined category in the classroom (e.g., teacher questions, student questions, student responses, teacher responses).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete transcript of what occurred during a lesson or part of a lesson</li> </ul>	<p><b>Scripting</b> The observer makes a written record of everything that is said by the teacher and by students during a lesson or part of a lesson.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete record of what occurred during a lesson that can be replayed or reviewed by the teacher</li> </ul>	<p><b>Audio or Video Recording</b> The observer or teacher records (audio or video) the lesson, focusing on the aspect of the class in which the teacher is most interested.</p>

*Note.* From *Another Set of Eyes: Techniques for Classroom Observation, Trainers Manual*, by K. Acheson, 1987, Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Copyright 1987 by Keith A. Acheson. Adapted with permission.



When selecting a specific method for gathering data, the mentor must consider the new teacher's own development in addition to the new teacher's request for data about a certain aspect of a lesson. For example, if a new teacher wants to know which students she or he responds to and how often, the mentor could use a verbal flow technique. Four months later, this same teacher, now further along in her or his development, may still be curious about his or her responses to students. However, at this point it may be more useful to find out how she or he responds to students in terms of choice of language or level of questions asked. For this purpose, the mentor may use the selective verbatim or scripting technique to allow for a deeper analysis of how the teacher responds to students.

### *The Reflecting Conversation*

A successful reflecting conversation provides objective data to new teachers, affording them a low-threat opportunity to analyze their performance and learn from it. As Taggart and Wilson (1998) point out, "Learning is not only dependent on what we see but how those observations are processed" (p. 60). The information collected through observing new teachers becomes a tool that mentors and new teachers use in the reflective process. The ensuing dialogue often becomes the beginning of the next planning conversation, as new teachers consider what to focus on given what they are learning about their teaching.

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## CONSIDER THIS

**Maintaining an objective, nonjudgmental stance during the reflecting conversation is often more challenging than during the planning conversation. Effective coaches invite new teachers to read through the data gathered and to reflect upon what they noticed about their teaching; these coaches do not interpret the data for the new teachers. This challenge can become heightened when the coach has a different philosophy about the way a lesson could be taught. It is important to focus on the relationship between what the new teacher intended for the students to learn and what the students actually learned.**

The mentor's primary concern in a reflecting conversation is to ask questions that promote the new teacher's reflections on practice. While these questions are sometimes coupled with sharing observation data, the mentor's questions in a reflecting conversation are often much broader, evolving also from what a new teacher has thought about and shared with the mentor. Figure 4.9 identifies the many ways that reflecting conversations serve new teachers — from helping them recall and understand what happened, to helping them analyze why something happened and how to use that information.



#### FIGURE 4.9: NEW TEACHER OPPORTUNITIES IN REFLECTING CONVERSATIONS

Reflecting conversations offer a range of ways that new teachers can benefit from the interaction. Mentors might encourage them to undertake any of the following:

- Summarize and reflect on what occurred during their lesson.
- Identify impressions and assessments of how the lesson went.
- Recall data supporting impressions or assessments.
- Compare what was planned with what actually occurred (teaching decisions and student learning).
- Infer how teaching decisions/behaviors impacted student learning.
- Reflect on new learning and insights and how they will inform future teaching.
- Identify what was useful with regard to the planning and reflective conversations and what, if anything, to do differently next time.

During reflecting conversations, mentors need to help new teachers engage in basic reflection as well as more complex reflection. Basic reflection refers to thinking about the “technical correctness” of a teacher’s decisions and usually involves taking into account just one or two aspects of what happens in the classroom. More complex reflection involves considering more and subtler implications of a classroom situation, including moral and ethical dimensions, and not only whether a particular teaching decision was “correct” or not. While some teachers may think about the basic aspects of their response before they can think about the more complex implications of their response, both of these forms of reflection are important. In fact, there are times when the technical correctness of a basic response supersedes any other considerations. The scenarios in figure 4.10 demonstrate the usefulness of each response form and how they differ.

Verbal flow and class traffic are the data gathering methods most helpful in promoting basic, or technical, reflection. Techniques of selective verbatim, scripting, and audio or video recordings are useful for setting up complex reflection.



**FIGURE 4.10: BASIC AND COMPLEX FORMS OF REFLECTION**

**Juanita: Basic Reflection Then Complex Reflection**

Juanita has trouble paying attention. Today she has been chatting during an entire lesson. Her teacher, Mr. Grove, reflects on what he can do. First he thinks of a basic response to the problem. Recognizing that Juanita pays more attention when he is closer to where she is sitting, he considers moving her seat near to his work space. Then he thinks of a complex response incorporating the fact that Juanita is new in the school and has few friends. He realizes that moving her seat will also remove her from the few friends she has made. So, rather than move her seat and take her away from a comfortable peer situation, he decides to make sure to move around the classroom more during his lessons and to spend more time closer to Juanita.

**Jamie: Complex Reflection Then Basic Reflection**

Ms. Rasthan has known that the practice fire drill would occur at 11:15 today. Her principal announced the fire drill at a faculty meeting three weeks earlier. It is almost 11:15 and she is finishing up a social studies lesson. She asks one last question. Jamie, who is very shy and unsure of herself, raises her hand to answer the question. Ms. Rasthan is thrilled at Jamie's willingness to share her opinion. Jamie begins to respond and is not finished when the fire drill sounds. Ms. Rasthan hesitates. Her complex response is to want to allow Jamie to continue — of all times to have to interrupt a student, and especially Jamie. However, a basic response is the appropriate one in this instance. Although this is a planned fire drill, there is always the possibility that it is the real thing. Ms. Rasthan knows that it is important that the students learn to respond immediately to the potential danger signaled by the alarm. She stops Jamie and asks the children to file out quietly.

**Danny: Basic Reflection Then Complex Reflection**

Ms. Dell had already spoken to Danny three times during the last 30 minutes of what she thought was a well-planned lesson. Once more his preoccupation with a particular math problem demanded her attention. Slightly flushed, she turned from the other students and fumed, "Danny, do you have anything to add?" Even though her pique was evident, happily Ms. Dell was saved from her basic response, one that would have reprimanded Danny for yet another interruption. Instead, almost before her question was complete, Danny blurted out, "Yes, I just figured out another way to do that one!" Minutes after the children had left for the day, Ms. Dell was at the children's conference table wondering why she knew that imposing a disciplinary measure was not the right response to Danny. Her reflection led her to the complex understanding that not only was Danny's learning process very discovery-oriented, but he also required opportunities to share his discoveries. Her challenge was to plan a way to meet Danny's needs that did not disadvantage the other students.



During the reflecting conversation, the mentor needs to refrain from an enthusiastic account of what she or he thought about the lesson. Praise is an ego booster, yet it does not always inform teaching practice. New teachers need to have opportunities to consider the data in such a way that they are able to reflect on their own lessons. Praise by the mentor can shut down the thinking of the new teacher, especially when the new teacher might have different feelings about the lesson. Similarly, if praise is given on one occasion and not on another, a new teacher may interpret the absence of praise as a negative value judgment. Praise is a form of judgment, and once a mentor begins judging the new teacher, the mentor will be expected to do so again.

Mentors can guide new teachers in addressing a range of topics when facilitating a reflecting conversation:

- impressions of the lesson based on recall;
- comparison of the lesson intent with what happened;
- inferences about the effect of teaching behaviors and/or decisions;
- how future teaching might be different; and
- how future coaching might be different.

Examples of specific questions to probe these topics are listed in figure 4.11.

## CONSIDER THIS

**While we have provided a fairly long list of questions as examples to use during the reflecting conversation, we encourage coaches to narrow the focus and limit the number of questions they ask. When asked too many questions, new teachers can feel overwhelmed or as though they are being “grilled.” Quite often, a few well-framed questions serve as a welcomed invitation for new teachers to reflect aloud about how they thought their class went, what they liked, and what they might do differently next time.**



**FIGURE 4.11: POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTING CONVERSATIONS**

**Questions to support summary of and reflection on the lesson, identification of impressions/assessments, and recall of data**

- As you think back over the lesson, how would you describe what occurred?
- How do you think the lesson went? What causes you to say that?
- What did you notice about the students during the lesson?
- What evidence did you see that students were learning and understanding what you wanted them to?

**Questions to support comparing the intent of the lesson with what occurred**

- How did what occurred compare to what you had intended?
- Were there any surprises related to your teaching decisions? Related to student responses?

**Questions to support inferences about how teaching behaviors and/or decisions impacted student learning**

- What did you notice about your own thinking and decision-making during the lesson?
- How did your thinking and decision-making affect students?
- (*If applicable*) What was the effect of the shift you made from what you had intended?

**Questions to support reflection on how new learning and insights will inform future practice**

- What were the “keepers” during this lesson? What causes you to say that?
- What, if anything, would you change? What causes you to say that?
- What will you do as a follow-up to this lesson?
- As you reflect on this lesson, what other implications, if any, are there for what you will do in the future?

**Questions about what was valuable and what could be improved about the coaching cycle**

- What was most valuable and/or helpful to you?
- How could this process be improved to better serve your needs?





We are often asked about what a mentor should do if he or she notices during a coaching observation something of concern that was not part of the agreed-upon focus. Is it appropriate to mention this observation to the new teacher? Raising additional information during the reflecting conversation that had not been agreed upon during the planning conversation may well appear judgmental to the new teacher. In matters of safety or ethics, the mentor has a responsibility to raise the concern with the new teacher and an administrator, if necessary, just as the mentor would address safety or ethical concerns with any colleague. Otherwise, however, the mentor needs to limit the reflecting conversation to a consideration of the new teacher's requested data. If the mentor adds new topics to the reflecting conversation based on things the mentor became concerned about during the observation, the new teacher will lose faith in the coaching cycle as a safe and truly collaborative process.

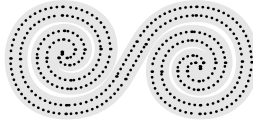
An appropriate time to introduce other concerns that may have come up during the coaching observation is during the mentor-new teacher's weekly meeting. By introducing the topic as one of many issues discussed during these regular sessions, the mentor may promote the new teacher's reflection on the issue without conveying an evaluative judgment of a particular performance.

As with the planning conversation, where and when the reflecting conversation is held can have a significant impact on its success. A reflecting conversation may be held any time from several hours to a few days following the actual coaching observation. Generally, however, the reflecting conversation should occur as soon after the observation as possible — but not immediately after. At the end of the observation, many mentors leave the observation data with new teachers. This way the new teacher is the keeper of the data and also has an opportunity to review and reflect on the data alone, prior to the reflecting conversation with the mentor. Mentors, too, need time for individual reflection in advance of the reflecting conversation. When both partners have such an opportunity before meeting, the reflecting conversation can be much more successful.

A mentor's primary role is to serve as a coach to support new teachers in becoming more intentional about their teaching. The wise mentor has deep knowledge and expertise but also knows when to keep that expertise in the background. Through deliberate application of coaching and communication skills, mentors develop trust and rapport with new teachers and provide them with a safe haven for taking risks, broadening their perspectives, and enhancing their teaching to support the learning and achievement of all students.



# Conclusion



We have focused on the induction phase of teachers' careers, with an emphasis on ensuring that well-prepared mentors provide focused, content-specific support to new teachers. While we believe that mentoring and coaching are essential to teacher induction programs, we challenge the view that mentoring and coaching are important only during induction. If we are to create systems of support for teachers throughout their careers, mentoring and coaching need to begin during teacher preparation, extend through induction, and continue as an ongoing form of professional collaboration and learning. The preparation, induction, and career-long support of teachers deserves and requires a consolidated effort on the part of administrators, teacher leaders, teacher associations, higher education faculty, state education agency staff, and the range of professional development providers that serve our schools and districts.

We envision reflective teaching practice that is promoted through collaborative coaching as a central feature in all phases of teacher development. When teacher candidates, new teachers, mentors, lead mentors, administrators, and faculty from colleges and universities all reflect upon their teaching in ways that challenge the status quo, the goals of providing high-quality teachers in all classrooms and ensuring high-quality teaching for every child can be achieved. The learning strategies embodied in mentoring and collaborative coaching are at the heart of sustaining professional learning communities that share these goals.

