

Thinking & Learning

Conference



BRUCE WELLMAN

Sunday 24 May

**Lenses and Language:
From Novice to Expert Practice**

Session 3

MELBOURNE

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Lenses and Language:

Moving Teachers from Novice to Expert Teaching Practice

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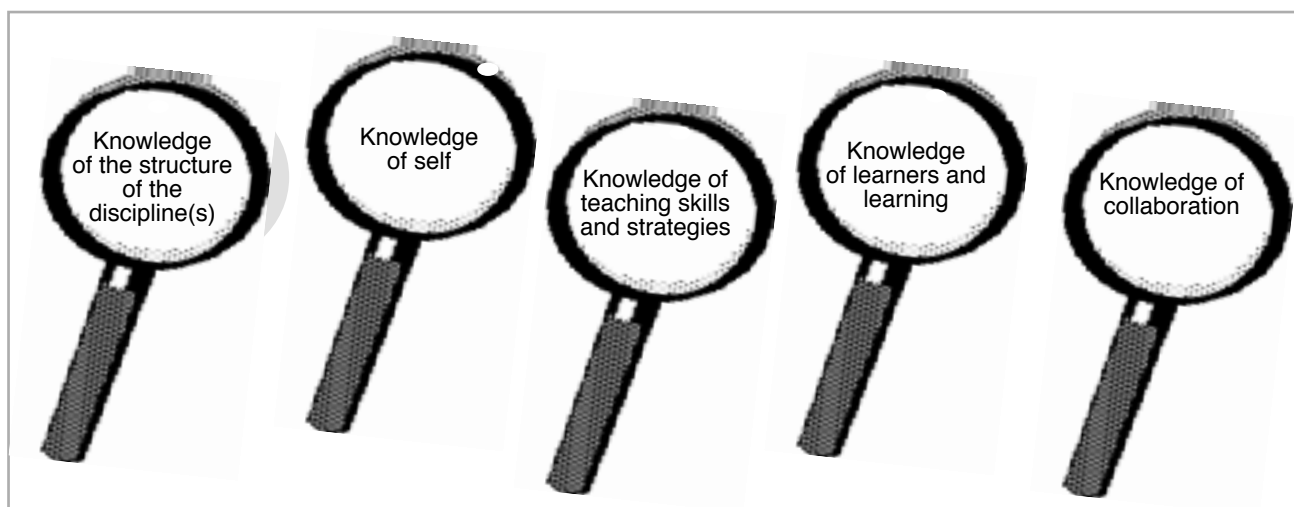
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DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL CAPACITIES



An Expert Teacher's Professional Lenses

The knowledge base on teaching is both wide and deep (Saphier, Haley-Speca and Gower, 2008). For our purposes, we are organizing it here within five broad regions. We examine knowledge of the structure of the discipline(s); self; teaching skills and strategies; learners and learning and collaboration.

These lenses provide frameworks for exploring growth areas for teachers. They offer organizers for the growth agents to structure learning-focused conversations with teachers, to set learning goals and to assemble resources for supporting and sustaining growth in personal and craft knowledge. These lenses are also useful to a growth agent for her own teaching and work with colleagues.

Knowledge of the Structure of the Discipline

Teacher knowledge of the structure of a given content discipline correlates highly with student success in that area. This understanding moves beyond content knowledge alone and into the organization of knowledge within each domain. The structure of the discipline means knowing the big ideas within a content area; the organizing principles, key concepts and the ways in which they influence one another (Shulman, 1987). In elementary mathematics, for example, understanding means being able to explain and illustrate a sense of number and how various operations such as addition and subtraction relate to each other. In social studies, it means showing students how to apply geographic, political, historical, economic and social perspectives to a given situation.

These deeper understandings greatly influence lesson design and lesson flexibility so that students can develop meaningful cognitive maps of their own (Darling-Hammond, 1997). When teachers have fragmented understandings themselves, they transfer these to their students and contribute to student misconceptions within that content area.

Teachers with rich structural knowledge are more flexible and resourceful in meeting the challenges that arise during classroom lessons. Real learning is messy. Students do not always fit neatly within the boundaries of lesson plans. Therefore, teacher content knowledge must always be greater and more complexly structured than that of their students. This allows teachers to prioritize and select those content objectives most appropriate for their students.

During planning and reflecting conversations, growth agents need to listen carefully for gaps in a novice teacher's understanding of important curricular ideas. Creating a climate in which it is safe for a teacher to ask for help with content understandings is a necessary condition for growth. No one, least of all a novice teacher, knows everything about a discipline. This is especially true for elementary teachers and others who teach more than one content area. Providing resource materials and including mini-tutorials during conversations reduces anxiety and at the same time helps to ensure content accuracy for that teacher's students.

It is important for teachers to understand and be able to model the specialized ways of thinking in a given field. Literature and physical science, for example, each have their own principles of inquiry. In social studies, ideas are organized in specific ways. Mathematics has a rich problem-solving repertoire. Writing narrative text is different than writing expository text. Each of these ways of knowing is a rich element within its content area. By promoting these skills and perspectives, teachers help students discover how those who produce knowledge and knowing in a specific domain develop and modify ideas. So, too, growth agents create these understandings for their teachers with whom they are working.

Each content area is a minefield of misconceptions. Experienced teachers learn to anticipate these as they appear within curriculum topics. Their lesson plans reflect this thinking as they design ways to surface and dispel these barriers to deeper understanding. Knowing which misconceptions are developmentally appropriate at certain stages of learning is valuable craft knowledge. Knowing how to help students work through them is even more useful. The blend of content knowledge, learner knowledge and teaching knowledge that connects subject matter to targeted learning strategies is called pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987). Expert teachers assemble and draw upon a rich collection of analogies, models, memory aids and explanatory approaches to represent ideas and understandings to their students. They also develop tricks-of-the-trade for helping students to grapple willingly with misconceptions and to accept these as part of the learning process. Helping a teacher anticipate likely misconceptions and sharing instructional solutions is one way that growth agents support improvements in teaching and learning within a given content area.

For growth agents it is important to remember that individual teachers approach each subject differently (Shulman, 1987). For elementary teachers this means the ways they approach specific content areas such as reading or mathematics. For secondary teachers this usually means specific topics within a curriculum.

One study of first year biology teachers noted that when the novices were presenting topics with which they had great depth of knowledge, they let their classes explore ideas as they asked questions that were more open-ended and promoted richer classroom discourse. When the novices were less confident of their own content knowledge, lessons were structured more rigidly the teachers themselves talked more and asked lower cognitive level questions (Carlson, 1991).

A teacher's approach to specific subject areas is a special consideration for growth agents who are supporting both elementary and secondary teachers. The choice of stance—consulting, collaborating or coaching may need to be weighted differently for different content areas or curriculum topics. While teachers encounter a general set of universal challenges, content specific issues need to be analyzed for possible interventions. If classroom management issues crop up at specific times of day, the teachers' comfort with a specific subject area may be an element to consider.

A growth agent's own content knowledge is a factor here as well. We all have our stretch areas. Sharing these with a colleague communicates a belief in lifelong learning. It is possible that the teacher may have content strengths to share with the mentor and can contribute to mutual learning in that manner.

Knowledge of Self

Knowledge of self includes the territories of conceptual, ego and moral development. It also includes knowledge of the personal values, beliefs and standards that guide daily decision-making. If teachers are to be effective with an increasingly diverse student population, they need to recognize and understand their own worldviews before they can appreciate and honor the worldviews of their students (McAllister & Irvine, 2000).

Values and beliefs shape the perceptions and judgments that carry teachers through their days. They undergird the goals teachers set for themselves and for their students. Beliefs and values are the most influential element in the type of classroom culture and learning environment that teachers develop with their students (Pajares, 1992).

Beliefs about the nature of learning and the purposes and process of teaching shape curricular and instructional preferences. These beliefs also shape personal standards for what students should learn and the desired qualities of student performances and products. In what ways is learning about the transmission of important cultural knowledge and the development of basic skills? In what ways is it about developing students' thinking and problem-solving skills and capacities? In what ways is it about developing a just society infused with democratic principles? In what ways is it about helping students discover and reach for their full potentials as human beings? And in what ways is it about promoting students' ethical and spiritual development (Eisner, 1994)?

These goals often overlap. In the heat of teaching and with the press of the clock and calendar, each teacher makes decisions about what to emphasize and what to let slide. These choices are at heart a matter of values and beliefs. Bringing these to conscious attention helps a protégé navigate conflicting options and the sometimes conflicting goals he or she encounters when his or her own beliefs bump headlong into institutional beliefs and values. Current stages of adult development influence how each teacher resolves these dilemmas. Caring growth agents support these explorations as vital lessons on the road to developing confidence and expertise as a teacher.

Knowledge of one's own learning style preferences is a special area of self-knowledge. It is important for novice teachers to realize that their preferred style may not be that of all of their students. Some of us perceive and process the world globally. Others prefer more sequential approaches. Some of us are task-driven and others are relationship driven. Some of us are visually dominant and others orient towards kinesthetic or auditory processing strategies (Guild & Garger, 1998).

All these style preferences, and the many subtle ways they manifest themselves, appear in our teaching. The ability to stretch against one's own preferred style is the hallmark of flexibility and the mark of a master teacher who can connect with a wide variety of learners.

Style is also an important area for growth agents to consider in their interactions with teachers. Flexibility in approach is especially important when the mentor and the protégé have very different learning style preferences. The growth agent needs to remember that these are preferences and that the most resourceful people can stretch and flex as needed. It is also useful to remember that under stress we revert to our most dominant style preferences. This means that growth agents need to be especially aware of this dimension during times of predictable stress. It is also an important consideration when a teacher has had a particularly trying experience and needs to process it.

The reflecting conversation, offers an opportunity for sorting out the dilemmas and tensions novices encounter in their daily work. Blocks or confusions in thinking are often a sign that a teacher has encountered a situation with students, parents or colleagues that violates some deeply held value or belief. This belief may not have consciously surfaced yet, but it is at the heart of this particular matter. A skilled growth agent will focus the conversation by exploring tensions from the colleagues point of view to help him or her discover the values that he or she perceives are being violated. With self-knowledge as a frame, the growth agent and colleague can then pursue other perspectives and possible approaches to the situation. The growth agent may also need to take a consulting stance to share other viewpoints and alternative explanations that have not occurred to the teacher.

Knowledge of Teaching Skills and Strategies

Expert teachers, like concert violinists, consciously develop their performance repertoires. They assemble and hone micro routines that are combined and applied to fit a wide variety of conditions and settings. Master teachers automatize many routines and basic moves to free cognitive space for more sophisticated sensing of the needs of their learners. Such unconscious competence is the mark of an expert in the classroom. The lack of automaticity with basic moves, such as getting and maintaining student attention, giving clear directions and establishing routines for smooth classroom transitions, consumes the emotional and physical energy of struggling teachers. This is why these and other areas of basic classroom management are usually the first level of concerns to be addressed. Until these fundamentals are under control, there is often little space for more sophisticated investigations of instructional practice. Lack of comfort in these arenas blocks openness to ideas and resources that address other areas of teaching practice.

Content specific pedagogy is an important variable that increases student success (Wenglinsky, 2000). Students whose teachers help them to develop higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills linked to specific content areas outperform students whose teachers only convey lower-order skills (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993). Growth agents support this essential part of the novice to expert journey when they conduct model lessons for teachers that emphasize these aspects of teaching. They also extend the teacher's skills during planning activities when they inquire into these elements. This is a place where the consulting stance adds great value at the point in the conversation when specific teaching techniques are being considered.

Knowledge of Learners and Learning

Knowledge of who learners are and how each learns best guides the special relationship between teacher and students. The greatest teaching repertoire in the world is wasted if it is not well matched to the needs of learners (Saphier, Haley-Speca and Gower, 2008). The push for smaller class sizes and smaller schools is a response to the need to know one another. In an increasingly diverse world, personal knowledge and close relationships help to connect learners to teachers, to important ideas and to each other.

The exploding knowledge base about brain development, learning styles, multiple intelligence, developmental differences and cultural patterns energizes Lee Shulman's conception of the need for pedagogical learner knowledge on the part of all teachers (Shulman, 1987). Developmental differences extend far beyond the primary grades. Over the years, these differences amplify as the span between students widens in Piagetian terms. There are many middle school and high school students who operate at a solid concrete operational level. These learners often run headlong into a curriculum organized by abstractions introduced through symbol systems. When teachers recognize these learning patterns and they approach instruction flexibly, they begin lessons and units with concrete experiences, then help students represent ideas with pictures and graphics as they support student language development and meaning making. This pathway leads students to firmer conceptual development and richer understandings of abstract ideas (Lipton & Wellman, 2000).

Given a changing student population, there is an increasing need for culturally respectful approaches to teaching and learning. Materials and methods that engage one population of learners may confuse or offend another. There is an important overlap here for teachers between this area and knowledge of self. How a teacher came to know an idea or discipline may not be an appropriate or effective cultural match for the students to which he or she is now teaching that same material. Growth agents support colleagues by providing teaching tips in this arena.

Language differences are emerging as an important variable for teachers to consider. There is a critical variance between students' social discourse and their formal knowledge of the structure and norms of academic discourse in specific content fields (Lee & Fradd, 1998). Skilled teachers help students bridge their own language to formal academic language, integrating personal and cultural relevance with content understandings. This learning is more robust and more likely to be retained by students. This concept means that ultimately all teachers, no matter what their content specialties, are teachers of language and teachers of thinking.

Knowledge of Collaboration

Knowledge of the whys and hows of collaboration is a hallmark of expert practice. Developing expertise in teaching is a joint venture. By participating in communities of practice, teachers expand and energize their own learning which in turn enhances the learning of their students. In powerful professional communities, the work of teaching and the craft knowledge for doing it skillfully are collective property. Studies of the best school systems in the world note well-developed patterns of high-quality, collaborative, professional engagement. In these settings, teachers work together to improve their own and others' instructional skills (Barber and Mourshed, 2009). Productive teacher teams regularly gather evidence of student learning and use these data to evaluate and modify instruction to target their students' learning needs (Hattie, 2009).

Successful collaboration requires and develops the knowledge, skills and dispositions for learning with and from colleagues. An essential value is that working with others is an important part of the work not something that keeps teachers from their work. In healthy collegial cultures professionals take collective responsibility for all of their students' learning and understand the links to how their own ways of working drive improvements in student performance. Ongoing cycles of assessment, inquiry and analysis, pattern-seeking and planning provide teachers with a fine-grained sense of the cumulative effects of shared practices (Lipton and Wellman, 2012).

Expert collaborators have practical knowledge of how adults work and learn together in groups. They know how to contribute to the learning of others and how to develop ideas and resource with their fellow professionals. Productive peer interaction takes courage as teachers navigate the vulnerabilities and insecurities of opening their physical and metaphorical classroom doors to the scrutiny of others.

Structuring and supporting the growth of teachers as colleagues is a critical growth agent responsibility. This is an important arena for applying the continuum of interaction during learning-focused conversations with individuals and teams.

Learning-focused Conversations: The Continuum of Interaction

Supervisor/ Specialist	Information, analysis, goals				Teacher
	Calibrating	Consulting	Collaborating	Coaching	
Guiding question	What are the gaps/growth areas indicated for this teacher based on present performance levels and the standards?	What information, ideas and technical resources will be most useful to this teacher at this time?	What are some ways to balance my contributions with this teacher's experiences and expertise?	What mental and emotional resources might be most useful for this teacher at this time?	
Function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulating standards • Using data to identify gaps between expected standards and present results • Defining problems • Prescribing results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarifying standards • Using data to analyze gaps between expected standards and present results • Offering information and ideas • Providing problem analysis and perspectives • Naming principles of practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jointly clarifying standards • Using data to co-analyze gaps between expected standards and present results • Co-generating information and ideas • Co-analyzing problems • Expanding perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referencing standards as a focal point • Using data to explore gaps between expected standards and present results • Facilitating teacher idea production • Mediating teacher problem-framing and analysis • Enhancing teacher capacities for planning, reflecting, problem-solving and decision making 	
Role in planning for action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining teacher actions/goals • Naming success criteria • Establishing timelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposing teacher actions/goals • Defining success criteria • Confirming timelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-constructing teacher actions/goals • Co-developing success criteria • Agreeing on timelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring teacher actions/goals • Eliciting success criteria • Clarifying timelines 	
Cues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credible voice • Using neutral language, as in "These data ..." • "This example ..." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credible voice • Using neutral language or personal pronouns, as in, "I think that ..." • "It is important to ..." • "Here is one way to think about that" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approachable voice • Collective pronouns, as in "Let's think about ..." • "How might we ..." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approachable voice • Second person pronouns, as in "What are some of your ...?" • "How might you ...?" 	
Cautions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take care not to let personal preferences become prescriptions. Judgments must be supported by clear, external criteria. • Use literal observation notes, classroom artifacts and assessment data to avoid subjectivity or bias. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor and manage the impulse to help or rescue. Stay learning-focused and don't let personal passion overcome patience with the developmental process. • Be aware that overuse of the consulting stance may build dependency on the supervisor for problem solving. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resist the impulse to dominate the conversation and provide the bulk of the analysis and thinking. • Monitor for balance in idea production. Don't allow personal enthusiasm or preferences to override the intention to co-create ideas and options. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce potential frustration by posing developmentally appropriate questions. Questions should stretch not strain thinking. • Be sure that questions allow for multiple responses and do not signal that there is a preferred answer. 	

From Novice to Expert Teaching

Learning-focused growth agents attend to the verbal and nonverbal signals of teachers to determine growth strategies, in the moment and over time. Non-verbal cues include intonational patterns, postural and gestural positioning, inflection, word emphasis and repetition, and the length and frequency of pauses. Verbal cues include length, degree of detail, source of ideas, and specific language of descriptions and responses to questions. These signals are developmental indicators, as well as indications of present emotional state and cognitive resourcefulness.

Acuity to these signals supports growth agents in making effective choices regarding their own verbal and non-verbal responses, as well as their choice of stance. By observing the teacher's verbal and non-verbal behaviors, skillful growth agents can monitor and calibrate the effectiveness of a given stance, and determine whether and where to shift along the continuum.

Planning and reflecting conversations afford an opportunity to monitor growth. The following dimensions serve as an index for assessing professional development. The skillful growth agent, attending fully, makes choices that balance support with challenge and move the novice toward increasing levels of expertise. The questions generated as a result of the growth agent's assessments become tools for producing increased awareness and self-directed learning for teachers. That is, questions purposefully crafted by skillful growth agents illuminate the larger principles of practice that produce skillful teaching. In all cases, depending upon the confidence, and completeness of the growth agent's response, these coaching questions might be followed by a shift to a consultative or collaborative stance.

The Language of the Teacher's Goals For Lessons and Units

As expertise develops, teachers move from strict adherence to the teachers' guide, or other external sources, to their own understanding of the content and students needs in order to determine

LEARNING-FOCUSED GROWTH AGENTS ATTEND TO:

The Language of the Teacher's Goals For Lessons and Units
The Details and Level of Sophistication of Strategies
The Depth of Content Knowledge
The Ability to Recognize and Generate Choice Points
The Sophistication and Depth of Evidence and Data Cited

learning goals. The confident marriage of source materials with professional experience when goal-setting is a developmental indicator.

In addition, setting learning goals that nest short-term objectives with longer-term outcomes, connecting the specific lesson or unit to the broader conceptual understandings of the curriculum or content area are hallmarks of growing expertise. So, too, are goals that include specific thinking skills, or clusters of thinking skills, such as problem-solving or decision-making; and social skills, such as listening to other points of view or engaging productively in a group task.

Supporting Growth from Novice to Expert:

When goals are established primarily from printed materials, the growth agent might ask:

“In addition to this goal, what else might you expect students to take away from this lesson or unit?” Or, “In addition to the content goal, what are some social skills that can be introduced, or reinforced during this lesson?” Or, “Given what you’ve been working on in this content area, how does this lesson fit with the larger picture for this year?”

When goals are limited to content objectives, the growth agent might ask:

“In addition to the content objectives, what other outcomes do you want your students to take away from this lesson?” Or, “As you consider the ways that you want your students to process this information, what are some specific thinking skills goals you might build in to your lesson?”

Choosing Stance:

If the response to these questions is still limited, navigating to a consultative stance might be appropriate. In this case, the growth agent might offer a framework, for example, *“In addition to a content goal, or goals, there are other objectives that can be taught during a lesson or unit, for example one might build in a social skill like taking turns, or working productively in a group. As I understand your design for this lesson, it seems to me that it lends itself very nicely to explicit instruction in working productively with a partner.”* At this point, the growth agent might stay in the consultative stance, offering a menu of several instructional strategies that would move learners toward this goal, or shift to a more collaborative stance and say *“Let’s think about a variety of instructional strategies that would accomplish both the content and the social skill goal?”*

Note the use of pronouns is related to each stance. *You* and *your* from a coaching stance; *me* and *I* from a consultative stance and *we* and *let’s* from a collaborative stance. These subtle verbal cues increase clarity for both the mentor and novice regarding the intention of the interaction.

This process of asking first, and then assessing the most effective learning-focused stance for the interaction is applicable to all of the indices described below.

The Details and Level of Sophistication of Strategies

Designing strategies to meet specific outcomes, and modifying them to differentiate for individual learners is an expert skill. A mindful growth agent listens to determine whether there is strategic application of instructional methods, or simply activity thinking. The former is a purposeful application, based on the assessment of learner needs, the latter, something found in a teaching journal, sourcebook, or the classroom next door that seems interesting.

Supporting Growth from Novice to Expert:

When instructional strategies are planned based on an idea found in a journal, or because the students like them, without relationship to desired learning outcomes, assessment of student readiness and appropriate fit for the content being explored, the growth agent might ask:

“In what ways will these strategies support your students in achieving the goals for this lesson?” Or, “Given what you know about your students at this point, how will this strategy build on their present knowledge and skills?” Or, “What are some criteria you use to decide which instructional strategies will be most effective?”

The Depth of Content Knowledge

Expert practitioners have deep knowledge of the structure of the discipline, or disciplines they teach. They are able to sort the nice from the necessary when developing and applying curricular outcomes to daily instruction. They make critical choices when time is short regarding these distinctions. Lesson plans demonstrate a relationship between what has already been learned and what is expected in future lessons. Skillful teachers also know where to emphasize important and recurring concepts that are foundational to further learning. Expertise in this area includes the ability to articulate connections between large ideas in the curriculum and to support students in making those connections.

Supporting Growth from Novice to Expert:

When content is viewed as something to ‘cover’, and lesson plans are replicated from teacher guides without regard to building conceptual connections, assessment of students’ present understanding, or contingencies for time constraints, need for review or opportunities for acceleration, the growth agent might ask:

“What are some connections between the content of this lesson and the larger concepts you want students to understand?” Or, “In this lesson, what are the most critical content understandings you are striving to develop?” Or, “If time runs short, which are the most vital objectives in this unit of study?” Or, “How might you sort the foundational outcomes in this unit of study from ones that you might consider extensions or enhancements?”

The Ability to Recognize and Generate Choice Points

For skillful teachers, clear intentions regarding learning outcomes drive instructional choices. As proactive planners, these teachers incorporate if-then thinking to build in potential contingencies in a given lesson or unit of study. As planned choices, which include instructional objectives, learning materials, interaction and grouping patterns, and time management are being implemented, these teachers consistently monitor their effectiveness, making adjustments to meet the immediate needs of the learners, while being mindful of the larger instructional picture. The ability to draw from repertoire to make in-the-moment refinements or revisions to the initial plan is a hallmark of expertise.

Supporting Growth from Novice to Expert:

While planning, if the sequence of instruction leaves little room for flexibility, or if the teacher has not considered any (or few) ‘what if’ scenarios, the growth agent might ask:

“As you implement your plan, what are some things you’ll pay attention to, to determine its effectiveness?” followed by “If things are not going as planned, what are some alternatives you might try?” Or, “If your less successful learners (or more proficient learners) are not engaged in this strategy, how might you refine the plan to increase their success?”

While reflecting, if there is little mention of potential reconsiderations, or envisioning or other possibilities, the growth agent might ask:

Given your reflections on this lesson, what are some elements you would be sure to incorporate in future lessons? . . . What are some things you might refine or rethink?”

The Sophistication and Depth of Evidence and Data Cited

Effective teaching requires the application of day-to-day and moment-to-moment assessment of student learning to inform future action. Expert teachers draw upon a wide range of data sources for planning and reflecting upon learning. Possibilities include text-based inventories, student work products, teacher-made tests, classroom observation of student behaviors, learner interviews and inventories, all of which are rich resources for determining short and long term next steps – for individual students, groups of students and the class as a whole.

Supporting Growth from Novice to Expert:

If it appears that the teacher's plans do not include specific methods for determining student progress, or if the teacher has a limited repertoire of sources of data used to determine next steps, the growth agent might ask:

“What are some ways to determine students' progress that you are building in to this lesson?” Or “How might the work your students will produce in this lesson be used to assess next steps for instruction?” Or, “As you visualize this lesson in progress, what are some things you will pay attention to that might be used for determining students' understanding?” Or, in addition to the end of unit tests, what can you build in to this unit to assess your students' readiness to move on?” Or, “What types of student work can you combine with in-class observations to increase your confidence that all your students are progressing?”

Again, in all cases, the quality of the teacher's responses determine the growth agent's choice of stance. If responses seem partially complete, or if the growth agent has specific information to add, a collaborative stance will facilitate the generation of rich information built upon the novice's presenting knowledge base. When the response indicates a lack of knowledge or information, a consultative stance, which includes the key principles of practice related to the issue, a framework for thinking about the topic, a think aloud that makes the growth agent's expert processing visible to the teacher, and/or a menu of suggestions will fill the immediate gaps and support future learning.

Supporting Growth from Novice to Expert: Attending to Cues

Directions: For each area below, generate an example of what you might hear from a teacher. Consider what responses would cue a need for shift. Construct two examples of what you might say/do in response.

1. Language of the Teacher's Goals For Lessons and Units

Teacher's language:

Growth Agent's response: (say/do)

2. The Details and Level of Sophistication of Strategies

Teacher's language:

Growth Agent's response: (say/do)

3. The Depth of Content Knowledge

Teacher's language:

Growth Agent's response: (say/do)

4. The Ability to Recognize and Generate Choice Points

Teacher's language:

Growth Agent's response: --(say/do)

5. The Sophistication and Depth of Evidence and Data Cited

Teacher's language:

Growth Agent's: (say/do)

Establishing the Third Point

Establishing the Third Point

Growth agents establish a clear focus for the conversation, a third point. In learning-focused supervision, a lesson plan or data and a standards-based scale with levels of performance serve as effective third points. The third point shifts the cognitive and emotional energy from the growth agent/teacher relationship to the data. Effective use of a third point includes both verbal and nonverbal elements: a physical shift from face-to-face to eyes on the data; physical reference to the data source with a still hand, or frozen gesture; and neutral pronouns when referring to the data, for example: the observations, these results, this student work.

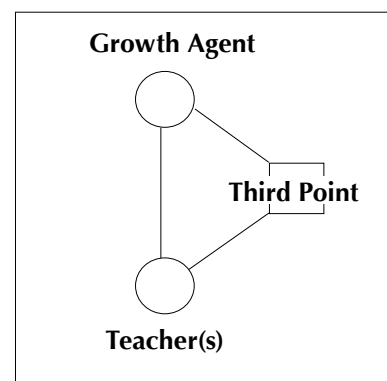
Coaches and supervisors facilitate thinking from any stance. Skillful growth agents intentionally guide the teacher's experience, through questions, highlights and references. Growth agents also use emphasis to clarify their purpose and importance, to sort significant principles or patterns from less significant details, and to create opportunities for their teachers to build and construct understanding.

Imagine, for instance, a growth agent and teacher are exploring post-observation data. They are focusing on the standards for instruction and reviewing the script of the teacher's questions. The growth agent offers the following question:

Growth agent: *"As you look at the script of your questions during this lesson, what are some comparisons you're making between your choices and the rubric description for Using Questions and Discussion Techniques?"*

Teacher: *"I noticed that for three of the questions, there was practically no wait time and many of the questions were recall. But, those are the kinds of questions my students can answer."*

At this point, the growth agent might take a consulting stance, sharing some principles of practice related to teacher questions and promoting student thinking, offering a menu of ways to scaffold for greater student success. She might then use a similar pattern exploring other observational data related to standards for instruction. In this way the teacher has several concrete examples that clarify and calibrate to the standards, as well as a model for a more sophisticated lens for examining her own practice. As they continue the conversation, the growth agent might then shift to a collaborative stance, suggesting that they brainstorm ideas for challenging student thinking.



Using the Third Point

Eyes on the data

Use a frozen gesture. . . "

Use neutral pronouns

Neutral Pronouns

"The data indicate . . . "

"Given these behaviors, it is likely that these students . . . "

"Based on these results, next steps need to be . . . "

Providing a Third Point:

External Third Points

- Samples of student work
- Rubrics defining excellence
- Lesson plans
- Curriculum guides
- Standards descriptions (content, student work or effective teaching)
- Test results
- Individualized education plans
- Annual reviews
- Parent letters, communications
-
-
-
-

Internal Third Points

- A recollection or description
- A personal observation
- A statement of concern
- A perception of a problem
- A statement of value or belief
- A judgment
-
-
-
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Mediating Nonverbally

Physically referencing the third point in a space off to the side between the parties provides a psychologically safe place for information, concerns and problems. This careful use of space and gesture depersonalizes ideas. It is now not the growth agent's information or problem, the teacher's information or problem or even 'our' information or problem. It is simply information or a problem about which and with which to think. Information placed as a third point frees the teacher to accept, modify or reject the idea as an idea – not connected to personalities. Thus, placement of the conversational focus creates a triangle, either literally or referentially, keeping the conversational container psychologically safe. Without this subtle, but critical distancing, the teacher might feel trapped in a web of relationship and have difficulty freely accepting or rejecting an idea, for fear of hurt feelings or repercussion.

Nonverbal tools, such as posture, gesture and voice tone are all indicators of the stance we are taking. In a calibrating stance, physical and visual focus should be on the third point documents. While referencing the documents with a frozen gesture, speak with a credible voice using neutral language such as “*the standard*”, “*this domain*”, “*the results*” to articulate expectations and performance gaps. The intention is to make standards and performance metrics the authority and not set up a power struggle between growth agent and teacher.

In a consulting stance, the third point information or referential space focuses the conversations on information and ideas and not on the growth agent or the teacher. Here again, the credible voice conveys the tonality of wisdom and experience. At times it may be appropriate to use personal pronouns as in, “Here's how *I've* learned to think about issues like this.” or, “In *my* experience is often works best to...” The possible danger is that some teachers upon hearing the personal pronoun will respond to it as a command and not a suggestion. When in doubt use neutral language such as, “Best practices suggest that...” or, “Other teachers with this dilemma have had success with...”

In a collaborating stance growth agent and teacher are operating both physically and metaphorically side-by-side, dividing their attention between the third point information and each other. The growth agent's voice tone is collegial and approachably confident using inclusive pronouns such as “*Let's* think about this...” or, “*We* might want to start by...” or, “*Our* next step might be to...”

In a coaching stance, the third point information is a catalyst for idea generation and problem solving by the teacher. There tends to be greater eye contact between the teacher and growth agent who uses a more rhythmic and approachable voice modulation to create a safe space for thought and reflection. The dominant pronoun is “you”, as in “So *you're* noticing some patterns in your classroom routines that seem to be working.” or, “What are some ways *you're* thinking about increasing student engagement in *your* next math lesson?”

Because learning-focused relationships are standards-driven and data-based, the use of a third point is especially important in the calibrating and consulting stances. Physically referencing the third point depersonalizes delivery of any information or judgment. It creates a “thing” to which the teacher can attach emotional reactions. By purposefully establishing a third point, the growth agent transforms a potential confrontation into an opportunity to provide clear feedback. By reducing the perception of personal attack, the feedback becomes information that can be heard and applied.

Third Point Examples

Observational data

Samples of student work

Rubrics

Lesson plans

Standards (content, student work or effective teaching)

Test results or other performance data

Learning-focused Conversations

A Template for Planning

ACTIVATING AND ENGAGING

CONTEXT

- What are some things about your students' readiness (social skills, routines, self-management) that are influencing your lesson (unit) design?
- What are some of the skills/ knowledge students will need to bring to this lesson (unit) to be successful?

PRESENTING ISSUES

- What are some special areas/ student needs you will need to address?
- What are some issues you anticipate might influence student learning?

EXPLORING AND DISCOVERING

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

- As you think about what you know about your students, and the content, what are some key learning goals?
- What are some ways that these goals integrate with other content learning?
- What are some thinking skills students will need to apply?

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

- Given these goals, what are some things you expect to see/hear as students are achieving them?
- Given these goals, how will you monitor student learning?
- What kinds of assessments will you use to determine student success?

APPROACHES, STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES

- What are some strategies you're planning that will both challenge students and support their success?
- What are some ways you'll ensure high engagement for all students?
- What are some resources or materials you/your students will need to support and extend student learning?

POTENTIAL CHOICE POINTS AND CONCERNS

- As you anticipate teaching the lesson, what are some points where students might struggle?
- What are some options for supporting struggling students and enriching those who need greater challenge?
- Should you notice that students' attention is drifting, what are some possibilities for reengaging them?

ORGANIZING AND INTEGRATING

PERSONAL LEARNING

- What are some ways that this lesson provides opportunities to pursue your own learning goals?
- What new learning/skills will you try or exercise in this lesson?

NEXT STEPS

- As a result of this conversation, what are some next steps?

Learning-focused Conversations

A Template for Reflecting

ACTIVATING AND ENGAGING

RECOLLECTIONS

- As you reflect on this lesson/unit, what are some things that come to mind?
- Given your recollections, what are some things that captured your attention?

PERSPECTIVES AND PERCEPTIONS

- In this lesson/unit, what was particularly satisfying?
- In this lesson/unit, what were some things that concerned you?

EXPLORING AND DISCOVERING

WEIGHING EVIDENCE

- What is some of the evidence that supports your impressions/ judgments?
- What are some examples that stand out for you (student responses, work samples, interaction patterns)?

SEARCH FOR PATTERNS

- Given what occurred, how typical are these results?
- What percentage of the time does this (behavior, learning, response patterns . . .) tend to happen?

COMPARE/CONTRAST

- How similar or different is what you anticipated from what occurred?
- How might you compare students who were successful to those who were less so?

ANALYZE CAUSE-EFFECT

- What are some factors that influenced what happened?
- Given (specific success/concern), what's your hunch about what may have it produced it?

ORGANIZING AND INTEGRATING

GENERALIZATIONS

- What are some big ideas that you are taking away from this conversation?
- Based on this experience, what are some new connections (about students, curriculum, instruction) that you are making?

APPLICATIONS

- What are some things that you are taking away from this experience that will influence your practice in the future?
- As a result of new learning, what are some goals you're setting (for yourself, for your students, curriculum, this unit)?

Feedback

From the science of cybernetics: The return of a portion of the output of any process or system to the input, especially when used to maintain the output within predetermined limits.

(A thermostat is an example)

In practice: Feedback is information about *past* behavior delivered in the *present* which may influence *future* behavior.

Instructional improvement is a feedback relationship between two systems: what a *growth agent* attends to and how the *growth agent* responds is one system; what the teacher attends to and how the teacher responds is the other system.

The paradox of feedback: When feedback works well we tend not to notice it.

And:

- Even when requested, feedback describes the values and beliefs of the giver.
- Feedback that is not absolutely relevant to the task at hand will not be accepted, and even worse will interfere with that task.
- If you have to make a case for the task-relevance of your feedback, you probably don't have a case, and you certainly won't have any success.
- Feedback is a collaborative process which one person cannot sustain alone.

Adapted from, What Did You Say?: The Art of Giving and Receiving Feedback. Charles N. Seashore, Edith Whitfield Seashore & Gerald M. Weinberg, © 1997, Bingham House Books, Columbia, MD.

Feedback Intervention Theory

- Learners regulate their behavior by comparing feedback with goals or standards and identifying gaps.
- Feedback directed at the self-identity of the receiver (praise or criticism) reduces the cognitive (and emotional) resources needed to improve performance.

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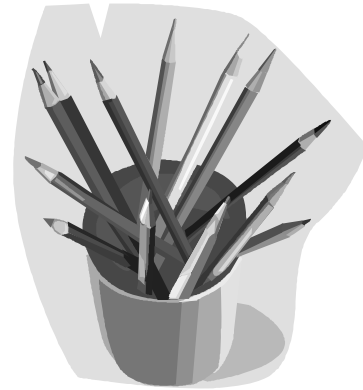
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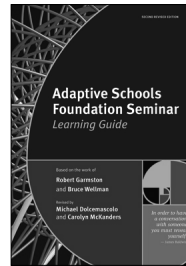
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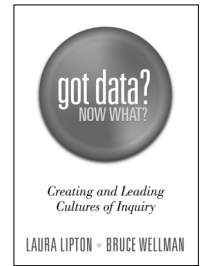
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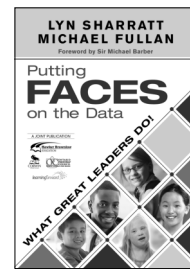
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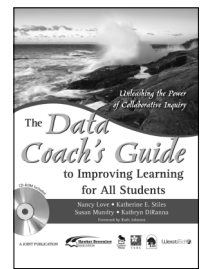
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