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Introduction

Why This Book? Why Now?

For over a decade, I have been fortunate to work with teachers, coaches, principals and region leaders from around the U.S. And through this work, I have watched coaching evolve from a cutting-edge innovation in the early 90s to a common set of practices that exist in many of our schools today.

Though many educators will gladly testify to the benefits of school-based coaching, questions still persist about its effectiveness. I regularly meet many coaches who fret about their impact. They worry that, though they are very busy, they aren't quite sure how their daily effort is making a difference with students.

Student-Centred Coaching seeks to answer this question by introducing a new way of looking at and delivering school-based coaching that puts the needs of students front and centre. By focusing coaching on specific goals for student learning, rather than on changing or fixing teachers, a coach can navigate directly towards a measurable impact and increased student achievement. Coaches are still busy, but now their efforts are targeted and aligned towards student learning.

Principals have been almost entirely overlooked with regard to coaching, yet without their leadership, coaching will fail to show the results we are hoping for. As the first book written with both coaches and principals in mind, you'll find a series of tools that are designed to foster dialogue, problem solving, and collaborative planning so that a principal and coach can work together to design and implement a student-centred coaching model.

Who Am I?

My journey began as a classroom teacher in an urban primary school in Denver, Colorado. It was the early 1990s, and with one year of teaching under my belt and a class full of second-language learners, I was in over my head. But through my school's partnership with the Public Education & Business Coalition (PEBC), an educational nonprofit based in Denver, I was provided with the support I needed from a literacy coach … an experience that saved my life as a teacher. It was this experience that led me to write *Learning Along the Way: Professional Development By and For Teachers* (Stenhouse, 2003) and also motivated me to spend the past eleven years working to develop systems of support for teachers so that our schools can become a place where we come together and think deeply about how to best address our students' needs as learners.

How to Use This Book

One of my favourite things about this book is the diverse array of educators that fill its pages. You will read about school regions that are rural, urban, suburban, large, small and somewhere in between. You will be introduced to school-based coaches who support literacy, maths, science and the humanities. And you will hear many examples of how principals are leading coaching in their schools. This rich array of individuals and perspectives shares a refreshingly simple goal … to increase the achievement of the students in their schools. And therefore provides the text with an overarching perspective that on first glance may be complex but when unpacked, is surprisingly straightforward and achievable.

It is important to keep in mind that no two schools are alike in terms of school culture, student population and teacher demographics. And for that reason, this book is not meant to be implemented as a "program". But rather, I encourage you to come together as a team around the concepts, theories and practices in an open and thoughtful way. You will find more success by customising and tinkering with the ideas and tools to make them work in your own setting.

The book is organised into three sections. The first section defines student-centred coaching and explores key factors for establishing a coaching effort that is driven by student learning. Chapter 1 defines student-centred coaching and provides key practices for focusing coaching on student learning. Chapter 2 provides the steps for get-

ting student-centred coaching up and running in your own school or region. And Chapter 3 speaks to the importance of establishing a learning culture in conjunction with a coaching effort.

Section Two explores the role of data and student evidence as it relates to coaching. Chapter 4 provides examples of how schools can draw upon student evidence in professional development and coaching. Chapter 5 explores strategies and tools for evaluating the impact that coaching makes on teachers and students.

The last section includes a variety of practices that underlie a student-centred coaching effort. Chapter 6 introduces classroom observations that are grounded in student evidence. Chapter 7 defines the systems and structures that contribute to a professional development model that is student-centred. Chapter 8 explores how we can engage adult learners while taking into account factors such as career stage, gender and generation. And Chapter 9 provides insight into how regions can develop systems of support for coaches.

In her book *Turning to One Another* (2002), Margaret Wheatley writes, "I've seen that there is no more powerful way to initiate significant change than to convene a conversation" (p. 22). It is my hope that this book will inspire you to talk with one another and, in turn, reach the goals that you have for your students and teachers. Let's get the conversation started …

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The Next Generation of Coaching ... Coaching Student Learning

Most educators are in agreement that the goal of school-based coaching is to improve student learning by providing continuous, relevant and job-embedded support to teachers. But now that coaching is firmly rooted in many of our schools, and becoming newly established in others, we have to wonder about its impact. We have to consider whether coaching is improving student learning as we had hoped it would. And if it hasn't, we have to reconsider the approach we've taken thus far so we can ensure that coaching impacts our students in meaningful ways.

What Is Student-Centred Coaching?

Student-centred coaching is about (1) setting specific targets for students that are rooted in the standards and curriculum and (2) working collaboratively to ensure that the targets are met. Rather than focusing on how teachers feel or on the acquisition of a few simple skills, we measure our impact based on student learning.

Coaching often centres exclusively on the actions taken by the teacher – making the assumption that if we improve the teaching,

then student learning will improve as well. There is some logic to this approach, but unfortunately an unintended outcome is we've spent so much time thinking about what teachers *should* be doing that we've lost touch with the most important people in our schools … the students.

As a leader in the field of professional development, Thomas Guskey has argued for a more student-centred approach for close to two decades. He writes, "In most cases, program effectiveness is judged by an index of participants' satisfaction with the program or some indication of change in their professional knowledge. Rarely is change in professional practice considered, and rarer still is any assessment of impact on student learning" (1995, p. 116). It's time to rethink how we define coaching and put our students front and centre.

A Natural Connection to Formative Assessment

As an educator, you no doubt understand that teaching is about applying the curriculum in a way that best addresses the needs of any given group of students. Achieving this depends on the identification of (1) what the students know; (2) what the standards, curriculum or program deems they need to know; and (3) how to design and implement instruction to meet these needs. Achieving this requires educators to formatively assess students and adjust the instruction accordingly. On paper this may sound simple, but in practice that is far from the case. It is a complex process that requires the following knowledge:

- Teachers understand how to apply a variety of methods, techniques and strategies to formatively assess students throughout their learning.
- Teachers have a well-developed knowledge of the standards and curriculum they teach.
- Teachers draw from a deep well of instructional strategies and practices to promote student learning.

Formative assessment is a core element of student-centred coaching because it helps teachers understand how to use student evidence to drive their decision making and meet the students' needs. In their seminal work on formative assessment in the mid-1990s, Wiliam and Black (1996) write, "In order to serve a formative function, an assessment must yield evidence that, with appropriate construct-referenced interpretations, indicates the existence of a gap between actual and desired levels of performance, and suggests actions that are in fact successful in closing the gap." They further note that "all assessments can be summative, but only some have the additional capability of serving formative

functions" (p. 543). W. James Popham concurs and through his work with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) has come to define formative assessment as follows: "Formative assessment is a process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students' achievement of intended instructional outcomes" (2008).

Can most teachers accomplish this alone? Of course there is a population of teachers who can, but there are many more who struggle to fit the pieces together in a way that helps students reach their full potential. These are the teachers who benefit the most from student-centred coaching.

Student-Centred vs Teacher-Centred Coaching

As we navigate the coaching landscape, it is clear that the journey is different with each and every teacher. For this reason alone, we can't think about student-centred coaching in black-and-white terms, but instead as a continuum of student centredness. The more student centred we are in our coaching work, the greater the impact will be on our students. The following figure compares student-centred

Figure 1.1   A Continuum of Student-Centredness in School-Based Coaching

More Impact on Student Learning		Less Impact on Student Learning
←		→
Student-Centred Coaching	*Teacher-Centred Coaching*	*Relationship-Driven Coaching*
Focus is on using data and student work to analyse student learning and collaborate to make informed decisions about instruction.	Focus is on what the teacher is or is not doing and addressing it through coaching.	Focus is on providing support to teachers in a way that doesn't challenge or threaten them.
Region curricula or programs are viewed as tools for reaching student learning objectives.	Implementing a specific curriculum or program is viewed as the primary objective of the coaching.	Region curricula or programs are a part of the conversation and are shared as possible resources for teachers.
Trusting, respectful and collegial relationships are a necessary component for this type of coaching.	Trusting, respectful and collegial relationships are a necessary component for this type of coaching.	Congenial relationships are more common for this type of coaching.
Coach is viewed as a partner that supports the teacher to meet his or her goals for students.	Coach is viewed as a person who is there to hold teachers accountable.	Coach is viewed as a friendly source of support.

coaching with a more traditional, teacher-centred model. Several key practices are highlighted that will be explored with others throughout this book (Figure 1.1).

Framing Coaching Around a Goal for Student Learning

Recently I had the opportunity to coach Kristi, an English teacher at a middle years school in Rapid City, South Dakota. As a consultant, I was there to model student-centred coaching for a group of literacy coaches from across the region. It was the second week of school and we were feeling that sense of possibility for a new school year that you only feel in those first weeks of school.

Kristi and I had talked the week prior to begin the planning process. She shared that since it was the second week of school, she was feeling out the group and trying to reinforce the importance of reading. She clearly valued independent reading, but wanted the time to be used productively. She also wanted to make sure the students didn't get bogged down in difficult text and wanted to be aware of whether they were able to comprehend what they read.

From our first conversation, I could tell Kristi knew a lot about teaching reading. My role would be to think alongside her rather than serve as an "expert" who was coming in to tell her how to teach. In the past, I may have jumped in and began tossing ideas to Kristi. And honestly, that would have been my response as a literacy coach in years past. But my thinking about coaching has changed since then, and now I am working on being less about a set of teaching ideas and more about student learning. This shift has come from years of worry about my impact as a coach. There were too many times when I felt great about my coaching work initially – only to see little to no lasting effect on the *kids*, probably because I was focusing all my attention on the *teacher*.

As I listened to Kristi's thoughts about her instruction, I wondered how I could serve her best in the coaching session. I didn't want it to be a dog-and-pony show but instead wanted to truly add value to her work with her students. So, today it wouldn't be about my ideas. Instead it would be about designing instruction for Kristi's students. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) write:

> Deliberate and focused instructional design requires us as teachers and curriculum writers to make an important shift in our thinking about the nature of our job. The shift involves thinking a great deal, first, about the specific learnings sought, and the evidence of such learnings, before thinking about