LUCY WEST ❧ ANTONIA CAMERON

Agents of Change

How Content Coaching
Transforms Teaching & Learning

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Contents

Foreword

In the past two decades, coaching has become one of the most talked-about methods for improving student learning. School leaders around the world have recognized that traditional forms of professional development have insufficient impact on teaching and learning, that something more powerful is needed.

Coaching has the potential to be this something more. It moves professional development away from talking about practice (declarative knowledge) to improving practice (procedural knowledge). Every time a coach helps a teacher implement a new teaching or learning strategy, that coach is also helping every student that teacher will teach. One step forward for a teacher is one step forward for hundreds of children. In a very real sense, coaches help schools create better futures for our children.

Educators and researchers take different paths to the same destination. My colleagues and I at the Kansas Coaching Project, for example, have dedicated fifteen years to developing, refining, and validating instructional coaching. Our research suggests that instructional coaches can have a significant, positive impact on teaching and learning if they (a) begin by getting a clear picture of what is happening in a teacher's classroom (often by video recording lessons), (b) collaborate with teachers to set meaningful goals, (c) identify teaching strategies to meet these goals, (d) provide support that helps teachers implement these practices effectively (clear explanations, a chance to see the practice in action, collaborative modifications), and (e) collaborate with teachers until the goal is achieved (which sometimes requires trying more than one new teaching practice).

Other approaches to coaching emphasize other methods. Lucy West and Toni Cameron's *Agents of Change* describes content coaching, an approach that emphasizes the importance of planning and co-teaching. The book's detailed description of how to be a content coach will benefit anyone interested in coaching.

First, West and Cameron explain that coaching should not be top-down. Rather, coaches should approach a teacher as a dialogic partner in "robust, academic discourse" about the environment of and activities in the teacher's classroom. Perhaps most important, West and Cameron describe what coaches should *not* do—the things that keep them from making a difference in teachers' and students' lives.

The authors also expand the focus of coaching beyond a one-to-one relationship. Coaches are agents of change, catalysts for cultural transformation in schools and districts, and should therefore attend to both individual teachers and their students and the broader culture and structure of the school. In conjunction with principals, coaches should create "an environment of questioning" in which teacher conversation focuses on improving practice to improve learning.

West and Cameron also make several suggestions for setting up a successful coaching program. They explain the importance of developing a shared vision of what coaches do and what they are intended to accomplish, distinguishing the coach's and the principal's role, establishing lines of supervision, and enlisting the support of district administrators. They also point out that coaches need to receive ongoing, targeted, professional learning to improve the art and skill of their own practice.

Above all, West and Cameron explain that coaching should not be implemented carelessly, without carefully thinking about and planning what coaches do, how they are developed, how they are supported, and how they challenge a district to move forward. They stress that coaching is not a program to be implemented the way a reading program might be: rather, it is a way to transform schools into organizations focused on student learning. This book can help anyone interested in achieving that goal.

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Acknowledgments

We thank and acknowledge the educators who have influenced the evolution of our thinking and our work over these many years. We have been fortunate to have many inspirational mentors along the way.

It is interesting that we both came to mathematics education in unexpected ways. For Lucy, the journey began at Bank Street College of Education under the tutelage of Hal Melnick, whose support and encouragement helped her re-experience mathematics in ways that sparked enthusiasm and passion for ensuring her students learned the subject better and more joyfully than she had as a child.

For Toni it began when she was selected in 1995 to be part of an NSF-funded project at Math in the City at City College of the City University of New York. It was here that Toni, under the guidance of four remarkable educators (Catherine Twomey Fosnot, Sherrin Hersch, Maarten Dolk, and Willem Uittenbogaard), experienced for the first time in her life the beauty and wonder of mathematics. This experience transformed Toni's thinking and changed the course of her professional life. In 2000, Toni became a member of the Math in the City staff, and later, co-directed the project with Cathy Fosnot. It was as a member of this incredible team of educators that Toni learned about the art of lesson design and the power of co-teaching. Her Dutch colleagues were instrumental in helping her understand the role of context, mathematical models, and how to think about designing units of study based on learning trajectories. This knowledge was essential to writing the fifteen Facilitator Guides that accompany the *Young Mathematicians at Work* video library, which Toni co-wrote with Sherrin and Cathy.

As part of their experiences at Bank Street and Math in the City, both Toni and Lucy were given the opportunity to teach mathematics to teachers. Lucy did this for several years with her co-teacher Linda Metnetsky and it was this experience that planted the seed that blossomed into her vision for coaching as a powerful process for educators. Marilyn Burns later welcomed Lucy into her national consultant team where she spent several years teaching the Math Solutions courses and learning from Marilyn and so many of the amazing educators she had the privilege to work with. Lucy learned about persistence, collaboration, continual refinement of lessons, and even about designing professional development, which later informed her work as Director of Mathematics for Community School District 2 and her business, Metamorphosis Teaching Learning Communities.

As part of Math in the City, Toni was also given the freedom to design inservice professional development and experimented with structures that led to on-site collaborations with schools. This work led to the development of teacher leaders whose classrooms became lab sites for professional learning communities focused on the instructional core. In this experimental phase,

Toni also had the good fortune to collaborate with Carol Mosesson Teig, the Director of Mathematics in District 15. It was in this collaboration that Toni was able to explore the essence of effective coaching. The NYC Coach Collaborative emerged from this work and is still instrumental in supporting coaches today. In fact, it is the current coaches in this collaborative who continue to challenge and inspire her to refine her ideas about coaching!

Lucy's most influential colleagues were those she worked with in Community School District 2 under the remarkable, courageous, and visionary leadership of Anthony Alvarado. As the Superintendent, Tony supported Lucy in myriad ways as she worked to cultivate supportive relationships with principals, the skill set of math coaches, the role of teacher leaders, and a common understanding of the characteristics of effective mathematics instruction across the district. One piece of advice Tony offered to Lucy when she later became Deputy Superintendent of Region 9 and was struggling to stay focused on improving instruction and learning, "People get fired at this level all the time. Get fired for the right reasons," gave her the courage and fortitude to do "the right thing" even when the right thing wasn't obvious and went against what policymakers were advocating.

In District 2, Lucy had several other key experiences that influenced her thinking as an educator. First was her work with Anna Switzer, who brought Lucy to District 2. As the principal of a very successful elementary school, Anna had a keen eye for discerning potentially excellent teachers—she also had a way of developing teachers into leaders. Working with Anna helped Lucy develop a repertoire for developing and nurturing potential leaders. Second was the team of coaches Lucy cultivated when she spearheaded the District 2 math initiative and who played a key role in developing our model of content coaching. Third was her collaboration with Fritz Staub, Lucy's coauthor on her previous book, *Content-Focused Coaching: Transforming Mathematics Lessons*. This partnership developed when District 2 collaborated with the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh to develop the Institute for Learning.

The work, friendship, and assistance of Margaret Wheatley was another profound influence. Her seminal book, *Leadership and the New Science*, was transformative. Margaret coached Lucy when she was Deputy Superintendent of Region 9 and helped her refine her thinking about how to lead change in ways that tapped rather than drained the energy of educators.

We would also like to thank a number of other people who supported us in our journey to complete this book. In terms of the actual writing, we'd like to thank Katherine Bryant, our very patient and persistent editor, who kindly nudged us along as we faced one obstacle after another. A big thank you to our support staff, David and Abbey, whose excellent organizational skills and attention to the details of running the business kept us free to focus on writing. Abbey even assisted us with our writing. Sherrin Hersch also read our chapters and gave us invaluable feedback. Our wonderful coaching team read parts of the book and gave us very useful feedback as well. Thank you! Thanks to Jim Knight for

agreeing to write the Foreword on very short notice and for doing this with enthusiasm. Finally, we would like to thank our families. Toni would like to thank her husband, James, and her son, Seamus, who put up with her ongoing mental absence for the past several years. She would also like to thank her mother, Millie, who has always been an inspiration and a source of encouragement. Lucy would like to thank her friends, Charles, Deborah, Hollis, and Susan, for their support and encouragement and her family for being understanding when she missed so many family functions in order to complete the project.

There are others too numerous to mention who have influenced our thinking along the way and we are truly grateful for all of the thought-provoking, risk-taking, tell-it-like-it-is mavericks, scholars, and educators who have generously shared their work and ideas with us along the journey. You have truly made a difference in our lives!

Introduction

A Good Question

We are often asked, "How do you do it? How do you get robust coaching conversations to happen on a regular ongoing basis in schools where time and tradition seem to be obstacles and external bureaucratic pressure the driving force?" We have spent the last decade pondering these questions as we work with coaches, administrators, and teachers across the United States and in Canada. We have worked with teachers at every grade level, in every possible setting—urban, suburban, rural—from pre-K through high school, in struggling and successful schools, and in some cases in content areas in addition to mathematics such as literacy, science, and technology. This book is written in response to the challenges we have witnessed and contains many surprising discoveries we have made and solutions we have tried.

A Decade of Practice

Since the publication of *Content-Focused Coaching: Transforming Mathematics Lessons* (by Lucy along with Fritz Staub) in 2003, educators from across the USA and Canada have acknowledged that content coaching is a powerful and effective approach to improving teacher practice in the service of student learning. Coaches in many disciplines, along with principals and district supervisors, have used the book as a resource and guide. Many readers have told us that the book is a dog-eared companion providing practical advice. Coaches, teacher leaders, and principals who participate with us in our coaching collaboratives, coaching sessions, or teaching learning communities have been energized, able to incorporate new practices that perceptibly improve school culture, teacher capacity, and student ability to think and engage in discourse and learn at deeper levels.

District administrators, principals, and coaches are often impressed by how willing and able teachers are to improve their instructional practices when they engage in content coaching sessions. They have told us that our work provides images of what they are aiming for in coaching sessions—robust, rigorous, and reflective conversations that focus on the instructional core and result in skillful and artful teaching of a broad range of students.

We have spent the last decade utilizing, mutating, refining, and exploring the techniques laid out in that initial book. This new book is designed to share what we have learned over the past decade and how our experience has informed our practice.

The Goals of This Book

This book revisits the underlying theories (knowledge-based constructivism; incremental intelligence and principles of effort-based learning) explained in *Content-Focused Coaching* and expands their application to content areas beyond mathematics. It explores the material on a larger scale (e.g., building a learning community within and across schools; systems thinking, change theory), and revisits the small scale (specific techniques and tools for coaches and teacher leaders) while adding new tools and techniques. The new video case study provides an example of Toni coaching a teacher, and Chapters 7–9 unpack the nuances of the sophisticated practice now known more simply as *content coaching*.

Our primary audience is K–8 coaches and teacher leaders. However, this book will also be useful for administrators in the process of designing a coaching initiative and for principals trying to understand the value of coaching and how to support the development of a coaching community in their schools. Our ultimate vision is the cultivation of a coaching community in which every adult in every school is coaching and being coached by colleagues or specialists concerned with developing informed, innovative, and powerful instructional practices that meet the diverse needs of students, including special needs and second language learners.

The goals of the book are twofold:

1. To give educators (coaches, teacher leaders, and administrators) a big-picture understanding of the transformative potential of content coaching and its use as a strategy to improve student learning and achievement systemwide. This goal includes developing a school-wide, sustainable, and vibrant coaching culture.

2. To give coaches and teacher leaders specific techniques, tools, and strategies (drawing on the content coaching methods from *Content-Focused Coaching* and the authors' continued work in the field) for working with individual or small groups of teachers. These techniques focus on the instructional core of planning, implementing, and debriefing lessons, and looking for evidence of student learning. The book also addresses the importance of reflection and refinement in the coach's practice as well as the teacher's.

The content coaching approach laid out in this book differs from other coaching methods in two key ways:

1. Content coaching emphasizes knowing and understanding the particulars of the content in order to teach it well. We focus on both the conceptual and skill aspects of content and discuss using tools such as curriculum materials, standards, and assessments to inform teacher choices. We emphasize mindful versus mechanical teaching. Like other coaching models, we do pay a great deal of attention to pedagogy and incorporate proven pedagogical practices in our work. However, we also pay attention to content specific pedagogy, particularly in areas like mathematics.

2. Unlike many other coaching approaches, in this approach the coach does not merely observe, model, or debrief lessons; the coach and teacher work together to *plan* the lesson and to *co-teach* it, as well as to discuss and debrief afterward. Coaches take responsibility alongside the teacher for the success of the lesson as measured in student learning. Our experience has shown that it is during the planning sessions that teachers internalize habits of planning that lead to more sophisticated ways of designing lessons. Co-teaching, a rather controversial aspect of our model (see Chapter 1), allows the coach to highlight in real time when to enact the specific changes in pedagogy the teacher is aiming for. Finally, the postconference provides time to reflect on specific classroom interactions in ways that keep the teacher focused on evidence of student learning and inspire her to remain on the journey toward improved practice.

Coaching Is Still a Rocky Road

Yet, a decade after the publication of *Content-Focused Coaching* and many books on coaching, educators confide that the coaching sessions they participate in or facilitate at their schools and districts seem to fall far short of their aspired goals. In fact, coaches often find that they face a myriad of obstacles that seem to prevent them from coaching in any meaningful way.

Very few districts have found a way to fully support coach development and training to the degree necessary to impact teaching practice systemwide. To confound the situation further, coaches, and the people who supervise them, often do not have a clear understanding of their role and how to best leverage time to improve instruction and learning across a school. Coaches across the country complain of becoming the "catch all" person in the school, assigned to do anything such as covering classes when substitutes are not available, lunch duty, administering tests, ordering and distributing materials, paperwork, or working with struggling students. None of these (mis)uses of a coach's time will help

to *cultivate an adult learning culture that will upgrade teaching capacity systemwide to the degree that student learning will substantially improve*, which is the primary function of coaching in educational settings.

In many cases, what frustrates coaches is the snail's pace of change. They are disheartened by the ever-present excuses that permeate a school culture defending the status quo. Their most pervasive lament is how the pressing demands on teachers' time sabotage coaches' ability to get time to talk, plan, and work with teachers. When, finally, time *is* provided to teachers in the form of common planning time or grade-level meetings, the time can be as short as half an hour once or twice a month—far from adequate to accomplish any substantive goal. In addition, there are often competing demands for this time.

In some cases coaches have difficulty gaining access to teachers at all. In just about every school there seem to be teachers who resist working with coaches or will not allow coaches into their classrooms or choose not to participate in collaborative sessions in constructive ways. In other schools coaches are spread too thin because principals insist that they work with every teacher on staff every week! These issues point to the centrality of the principal/coach relationship which, we will argue, works best as a partnership rather than a supervisory one.

Our big-picture, long-term vision is to transform factory-model schools into multigenerational learning centers. We believe that coaches can play a pivotal role in this transformative process when they, and those who supervise them, understand their potential and their role. The time is now for us to innovate, upgrade, and reinvent education in ways that empower educators and students, and to cultivate learning cultures that engender creative and healthy engagement in today's complex, multifaceted, fast-paced, and demanding times. The time has come for educators to stop behaving in ways that limit their own learning and to stop allowing outside forces to dictate practices and policies that keep us focused on testable minutiae instead of big ideas, essential questions, and the habit of learning to learn.

We see coaches as influencers who are conscious of their leadership potential and use it to change the parts of the system that do not promote equity, student achievement, and professional growth. Coaches can join forces with other leaders and infuse the system with fresh energy by inviting educators at all levels to revisit their motives and values and to remember their calling to teach and the difference they want to make. Coaches can be the voices in the system who ask the hard, provocative questions that awaken educators from their policy-imposed slumber and rejuvenate their passion and courage to do whatever it takes to educate the young people who depend on them to learn, to reason, and to act consciously, compassionately, and creatively in a world that needs all the gifts they have to offer.

How to Use This Book

This book can be read cover to cover or in sections. Section I consists of the theory of content coaching, the big-picture work of creating coaching initiatives, and defining the roles of all the players. Section II dives into the general skill set all coaches need in order to coach well in any content area. In this section, we also provide activities designed to help coaches incorporate new "coaching moves" or skills. Section III (Chapters 7 through 9) is accompanied by a video example of a coaching session and examines a particular coaching session through preconference, lesson, and postconference and unpacks the specific moves a content coach makes to ensure teacher development and growth.

In Chapter 1, we lay out the purpose, foundational premises, and practices of content coaching, building on West's and Staub's earlier work. This chapter is a refresher for those who have read the earlier book and provides new insights from our experience since its publication, including a brief discussion on the application of systems theory as it relates to content coaching.

In Chapter 2, we examine the present state of coaching in our schools and make suggestions for a more thoughtful, systematic way to design and implement coaching initiatives. This chapter is especially useful for administrators charged with creating, supporting, and maintaining a coaching initiative. Coaches will also find this an interesting chapter in that it may spur ideas in how to advocate for role clarity, support from administrators, and training in areas that most teachers who transition to the coaching role do not bring with them. The chapter also provides useful practices and tools that assist in building a reflective coaching culture that transcends titles and tradition.

Chapter 3 homes in on the role of each player in the system—the coach, the teacher leader, the teacher, the principal, and district supervisors—to ensure that coaching is well received in schools and results in upgrading the instructional practices of all.

The second section of the book is aimed at cultivating the capacity of coaches as self-aware leaders (Chapter 4, "Know Thyself") and skillful communicators (Chapter 5, "Communication Is Key").

In Chapter 6 we turn our attention to how to tune in to the needs and aspirations of the teachers with whom we work. In this chapter we discuss how to know where to begin the coaching relationship and what to focus on at varying times during the coaching cycle.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 take the reader through an annotated case study, with tools to assist coaches to name and practice specific coaching moves that we have found to be very

effective in helping educators improve their practice. We highly recommend that you watch the corresponding online video *before* reading each of the three case study segments.

The summary chapter is a call to action designed to inspire the reader to remain optimistic and to take small, effective steps toward very large, transformative goals.

We have written this book for educators who are intent on making a difference in ways that improve the lives of all our children and who want to upgrade the teaching profession to a place among the most honored and respected of professions. We trust that you will find our book informative, provocative, and useful.

1

What Is Content Coaching?

In this chapter we will explain the hypotheses underlying our work, explain the theories that inform that work, and describe the three-part-cycle of actual coaching sessions. We have come to understand that, like great teachers, effective coaches need to understand the big picture in which the coaching is situated as well as attend to the details of the day-to-day work. It is this back and forth view that enables creative solutions to solve challenging issues.

Content coaching is an organic, eclectic, and responsive model of coaching. It is inquiry-based and continually evolving. Since the publication of *Content-Focused Coaching: Transforming Mathematics Lessons*, we have played with content coaching in every kind of school setting, across content areas, and at all grade levels. We continue to learn from our practice and refine our thinking through experience.

Four Hypotheses

Our experience has led us to four hypotheses that underlie our practice of coaching:

- *In order to prepare students for life in the twenty-first century, the focus of education needs to be on learning to learn, create, innovate, communicate, and discern.*

- *In order for teachers to facilitate robust learning habits in their students they need to practice these learning habits themselves.*

- *To upgrade instruction we need to focus on the underpinning concepts in a domain as well as attend to the development of skill within that domain. Therefore, teachers need to have deep and flexible knowledge about the content they teach and about how people learn that content.*

> ▸ *To ensure a consistent level of effective instruction across a school or district, we need to think systemically and take actions that ensure that all the adults in the system are interacting in productive ways.* (We will address systems thinking later in this chapter.)

Learning to Learn

We see how rapidly the world is changing, and how important it is to be focused, flexible, and resilient. Let's face reality: students do not need to go to school to get information; they have Google, and this search engine is much better at providing information than any individual. Educators who think their primary goal is to provide information have already had—whether they know it or not—their jobs outsourced to the Internet! For this reason alone, today's classrooms cannot just be about covering the curriculum or providing information to students.

Is there a role for schools and educators in this new paradigm? Absolutely. Computers and the Internet can never teach students to be discriminating consumers, nor can they develop their capacity to reason. This, then, is the job of educators. And to do this job well, we need to rethink and redefine our purpose.

Educators who do not discern, question, engage, and grow, personally and professionally, cannot possibly teach these skills to students. We, the authors, have taken this challenge on as educators and as human beings. It is one we sometimes struggle with, as we, like so many, would often prefer to do what we know how to do well, rather than stretch into new learning. Like so many others, we often find ourselves teaching what we are trying to learn and practice ourselves. In our view, it is the coach's job to help teachers develop critical learning behaviors and learn how to utilize those behaviors to think deeply about what it means to teach well. Our bottom line definition of "teach well" means that we can identify evidence on a daily basis showing that students are learning content, learning to articulate their ideas orally and in writing, and managing their own learning. Coaches can model learning to learn by their commitment to their own learning and by engaging in a professional community in which we use creativity and inquiry to find solutions to pressing problems.

Teachers Need to Practice Learning Habits

When was the last time adults in your school engaged in an in-depth conversation about a topic they teach, and did this so robustly that they learned new ways of thinking, new strategies for approaching the topic, and new ideas to meet the needs of all students? How often do such conversations happen at grade-level or departmental meetings, whole-staff meetings, or even workshops?

If teachers are not engaging in academic dialogue centered on the content they teach and how people learn, then it is highly unlikely that they are engaging their students in these practices either. We are not referring to "data driven" meetings in which teachers look at student test scores and acknowledge the fact that students are struggling with specific subject matter, or meetings in which administrators admonish teachers to work on this or that and essentially nothing changes. We have learned that admonishing people to do better often stems from a belief that people are unmotivated to do better rather than an understanding that teachers are generally teaching to the best of their present ability, knowledge, and skill and will need to learn something they don't know in order to teach better. In other words, we confuse motivation with skill and use pressure instead of coaching to make improvements.

Instead, we are talking about meetings of a very different nature, meetings in which teachers are challenged (and willing) to *learn* publicly—alongside their colleagues and in each other's classrooms—new skills and practices that will improve student learning. We are talking about ongoing and regular forums that help teachers continually question and refine their practice.

Content coaching is a process that is designed to cultivate rigorous, collaborative, professional learning habits among adults. We have found that when we challenge ourselves to learn—to question, to reflect, to refine our thinking—these habits are mirrored in classrooms. Our expectations for ourselves become our expectations for our students. Interactions among adults—how they talk with one another, what they talk about, to what depth they examine and question the content and curriculum they teach, how often they consider the pedagogy they use, how often and to what degree they collaborate—in turn is reflected in how well students do these things.

This insight is not just our idea; Vygotsky's sociocultural theory contends that children grow into the intellectual community that surrounds them. We are simply saying that when teachers engage in rich academic conversations that inquire deeply into content and pedagogy they have a better shot at cultivating student capacity to engage in rich academic discourse. Through discourse we find out what others are thinking and can learn to stay open and become more willing to consider various perspectives. If we can stay in dialogue we can develop richer understanding of the content under discussion. This is most important when we experience tensions in the field due to conflicting policy messages such as teach to the test, using a mechanistic pacing calendar while at the same time differentiating to meet the needs of individual kids, and using sophisticated techniques to master a concept, strategy, or skill.

The Importance of Content Knowledge

Our hypotheses are based on the idea that teaching is a complex, "unnatural" act (Ball and Forzani 2009). Teaching well requires a complex set of skills, which includes having a large body of knowledge at one's fingertips and being able to use this knowledge in ways that give

a wide range of learners access to it. Because knowledge in any given field is not stagnant, teachers need many opportunities to expand what they know throughout the course of their careers. This type of learning can happen in workshops or in university courses. However, classroom teachers also need opportunities to see how children experience the content in order to design effective lessons. They need many opportunities to experiment with different pedagogical techniques that support learning. Knowing what to teach is one thing; knowing how to teach it is something entirely different. Content coaching addresses both the *what* and the *how* of teaching.

Teachers may need to shore up their content knowledge or may have rich understanding of the content they teach. But having to think about how to implement a lesson, what questions to use, how to differentiate to meet the needs of a range of learners, moves one quickly beyond content knowledge and into the realm of pedagogy. Teachers need to understand how content comes to life in the minds of learners. Thinking about how children develop big ideas or grapple with essential questions, what strategies they will use and what struggles they will have, helps teachers predict what might happen in the classroom and plan how they can respond in ways that facilitate learning.

Content coaches focus coaching conversations on the content that will be taught and the evidence that will inform us to what degree students articulate their understanding of the content. Using this lens, we have an opportunity to cultivate instructional coherence from classroom to classroom and simultaneously support innovation and individual style in instruction. Note that coherence is different from uniformity. We are not aiming for all teachers to teach the same material on the same day in the same way as if they were robots and children were factory-produced widgets. Coherence means that all teachers are mindfully considering ways to teach the same curriculum to students in ways that meet their needs while simultaneously meeting the demands of the standards for the grade and honoring the unique style of the teacher. Achieving coherence is more likely when principals and coaches work as partners to tease out the differences between policies that promote mechanistic approaches from practices that promote mindful and informed teaching.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Content coaching is based on a few theories that inform our practice:

- ‣ The incremental theory of intelligence and the effort-based principles of learning derived from this theory.
- ‣ Knowledge-based constructivism which adds to the Piagetian and Vygotskyan views of constructivism.

▸   Systems theory which states we must consider the whole system and how the parts in the system interact with one another, not just focus on the parts in the system that may need to improve.

An Incremental Theory of Intelligence

Underpinning our work as content coaches is an underlying theory of intelligence known as the incremental theory of intelligence. This theory suggests that intelligence is situational and learnable. In other words, we can all become smarter if we decide to put in the effort and surround ourselves with people who can encourage us.

The incremental theory of intelligence stands in contrast to the entity theory of intelligence. The entity theory of intelligence is the theory upon which most of our educational policies have been based for over a century.

> For nearly a century, the American education system has been using IQ scores and similar normed measures to compare children to each other on a statistical bell curve, to predict who would and would not profit from a rigorous academic education. We have institutionalized the belief that the most reliable predictor of achievement is the kind of innate mental ability we call 'intelligence'. . . .
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> For most of this century, American education has operated on the premise that inherited ability is paramount, that there are innate limits to what people can learn, and that the job of the schools is to provide each student with an education that befits his or her naturally-occurring position on the statistical bell curve.
>
> Many people now also believe that greater effort by and for students who don't learn easily can compensate for limitations in students' native ability. This idea lies behind programs of "compensatory education" such as Head Start and Title I. But the compensatory idea still features aptitude: Only the not-so-smart have to put in much effort. (Resnick and Hall 2000, 1–2)

Which theory of intelligence—aptitude or incremental—we tend toward impacts motivation, self-esteem, and goals. If we think having to practice and struggle is a sign of low intelligence, we are likely to avoid tasks that require us to do so. We are also likely to believe that standardized and intelligence tests accurately measure our capability. This stance is known in the research as "performance oriented" (Dweck and Elliott 1983). Adults and children who tend to give up easily and avoid challenges generally have internalized an entity theory of intelligence. When you hear teachers, administrators, or anyone else say things like, "these kids can't," or refer to "my higher level kids" they are operating from an entity theory of intelligence, whether or not they are aware of it. US

education policy is performance based as evidenced by its emphasis on testing coupled with punitive sanctions. There is mounting evidence that policies like No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top raise anxiety and ultimately hinder learning by focusing on performance rather than learning (Ravitch 2010).

If, on the other hand, we think that effort is part of learning and that we can learn to be more intelligent, we operate from an incremental theory of intelligence. In this frame of thinking, mistakes and failure are a necessary part of the learning process. It follows then that hard tasks present interesting challenges and people who think like this are more likely to be learning oriented.

> People with learning-oriented goals, by contrast, have an *incremental* theory of intelligence. They believe intelligence develops over time by solving hard problems, working on them, "massaging" them, "walking around" them, and viewing them from another angle. This goes with the belief that high problem-solving effort actually makes you smarter. In general, these individuals display continued high levels of task-related effort in response to difficulty. They love challenge and will often ask for a harder problem or a more difficult book. (Resnick and Hall 2000, 4)

Content coaches encourage a learning orientation, and listen for beliefs about intelligence during their discussions with teachers. When beliefs surface, coaches highlight them for teachers and help them inquire into the expressed beliefs. What would educational systems look, feel, and sound like if we truly believed that all people can learn anything they put their minds to with the right kind of effort and with the help of knowledgeable others?

Content coaches invite educators to rethink our instructional approaches by learning to notice, question, and inquire into our beliefs about intelligence. Learning to learn is tantamount to becoming successful in our rapidly changing world.

Constructivism

We believe that people learn by constructing meaning for themselves. We can't simply transfer knowledge from one person to another. Each person must actively construct meaning. Piaget is known as the father of constructivism, a learning theory that essentially says that we construct meaning in our own minds as we actively engage in learning.

Vygotsky, a *social* constructivist, went on to point out that learning takes place in social settings (Vygotsky and Cole 1978). We learn from others and with others, through conversation and observation of the cultural norms, habits of discourse, and ways others interact in a given setting. Resnick and her colleagues coined the term "socializing intelligence" and named it as a principle of learning through which they essentially apply Vygotsky's theory to educational settings (see principles of learning below).

Resnick added a new term, *knowledge-based* constructivism, to the mix. She contends that it is not possible to teach people to think without giving them rich, relevant things to think about.

> There is no such thing as a thinking skill without good, solid stuff to think about. In fact, what you know is the biggest determinant of how well you will understand the next thing you read on a topic or how crisply you will be able to make and defend your arguments. Reading comprehension, reasoning skill, writing skill, problem solving—all of these thinking skills depend on what you know. The only way to develop thinking skills is around a knowledge core. Endorsing the constructivist argument that kids have to be active learners in order for learning to take hold does not free us of the obligation to offer a very solid, academically rigorous curriculum with important facts and ideas in it that kids have to know. (Resnick and Hall 2000, 4)

One of the main reasons content coaches focus on content is to make sure that students have something important to wrap their minds around as they learn to think, reason, and engage in productive discourse.

From Theories to Principles of Learning

Lauren Resnick and others have translated the learning and intelligence theories above into principles of learning. Content coaches use these principles as the basis for lesson design. You can find the complete list of principles at http://ifl.lrdc.pitt.edu/ifl/index .php/resources, but the principles we focus on in particular are: organizing for effort, accountable talk, socializing intelligence, academic rigor in a thinking curriculum, and self-management of learning.

- ‣ **Organizing for effort** means building a school and a classroom around the idea that students' success depends on continued, directed effort, not innate ability.

- ‣ **Accountable talk** requires everyone involved in a discussion to use accurate, appropriate evidence and reasoning, pay attention to and respond to what others say, and take responsibility for their contributions.

- ‣ **Socializing intelligence** refers to the belief that intelligence is more than being able to think quickly; it is "a set of problem-solving and reasoning ca-pabilities along with the habits of mind that lead one to use those capabilities regularly. Intelligence is equally a set of beliefs about one's right and obligation to understand and make sense of the world, and one's capacity to figure things out over time" (http://ifl.lrdc.pitt.edu/ifl/index.php/resources).

Teachers can teach these skills and habits of mind by expecting students to use them, and holding them accountable.

▸ **Academic rigor in a thinking curriculum** emphasizes lessons and units of study centering on major concepts and pedagogy that cultivates active reasoning and engaged, deep thinking.

▸ **Self-management of learning** focuses on key metacognitive skills of self-monitoring, questioning, evaluating feedback, time management, using background knowledge, and monitoring one's progress toward a learning goal.

The Importance of Systems Thinking

Content coaching requires systems thinking: thinking about a whole organism or organization and the interactions within that organization when we try to influence the organization to improve in some way. Dr. Russ Ackoff explains a system this way:

> A whole . . . that consists of parts each of which can affect its behavior or its properties. . . . Each part of the system when it affects the system is dependent for its effect on some other part. In other words the parts are interdependent, no parts of the system or collection of the parts of the system has an independent effect on it. . . . The parts are all interconnected. Therefore, the system is a whole that cannot be divided into independent parts. (Ackoff 1994)

Somewhat like ecosystems in nature, schools and districts are considered living systems. They are made up of people—living systems—who have different jobs within the system and work more or less together to accomplish the work of the system. When we identify mutual purpose (e.g., improved student learning) and consider the variables that impact student learning (e.g., instruction, curriculum, learning environments, teacher skill and knowledge base, external policy pressures, student characteristics, habits and prior knowledge, etc.) and how those variables interact with one another (e.g., relationships), we can influence a system and nudge it toward improvement.

Living systems are ever changing, interdependent, and self-organizing. They continually try to maintain equilibrium (e.g., the status quo). We often try to regulate parts of the system only to find out we rarely get the results we are aiming for through this approach. For example, we try to improve instruction by imposing standardized tests that supposedly "raise the bar" and find that teachers end up teaching to tests in ways that

actually lower the bar by narrowing the curriculum. We add sanctions when test scores don't increase in hopes that this will motivate teachers to do a better job, only to find out that the sanctions raise anxiety, not performance, because the issue is not motivation but skill. Teachers may not have the content knowledge and pedagogical repertoire to meet the higher demands, and the testing initiative has not taken into account how to improve teacher content and pedagogical skill.

The point is that when we want to infuse something new into the system, we need to think about all the variables at play and consider how the new addition might impact the entire system. We need to think about unintended impact as well as the improvement we are trying to accomplish.

Schools as Systems

Systems are designed to get the results they presently get. In order to get different results we have to redesign the system. For example, our company had issues getting paid on time from some school districts we worked with and on a couple of occasions we never got paid for work we provided. In order to resolve this issue we had to look at our entire system from the time we accepted a job to the time we actually got paid. Not surprisingly, our findings showed that everyone—the leaders, the assistants, the book-keepers, the consultants, and the clients—had a role to play in both creating and resolving the problem. Once we traced all the components of the system and noticed where the breakdowns in communication and process were occurring, we created a system from first contact with a potential client to payment for services rendered that now has our accounts receivable up to date almost all the time. We looked at both the details and the interactions in the overall system. The solution was in the details, once we understood how the whole system interacted.

How does this apply to school systems? When we consider how schools are organized, we realize that many schools and districts are organized as if the parts are independent from one another. Teachers tend to work independently in individual classrooms and principals rarely meet with principals from other schools to learn from one another. Districts are organized into separate departments. For example, people who are in charge of assessment may be in a different department than those who supervise instruction, who in turn are in a different part of the organization than those who select curriculum materials, who are separate from those in charge of special education. In most instances these players from across the organization rarely come together to collaboratively make decisions with the whole system in mind. Often they are using different funding streams and have different goals in mind. This fragmentation in the design of the organization causes people to search for solutions for the part of the organization they work in rather than to get the various parts of the organization to work together.

Fixing Parts Instead of Wholes

Another way to think about this is that people attempt to fix things in one part of the system and rarely understand that their attempts to do so are extremely unlikely to succeed because they have not been based on systems thinking (Ackoff 1994). Consider a district that buys a new program in an attempt to upgrade instruction in a particular content area. In order to succeed, the district would also have to ensure that teachers have the knowledge and skills to implement the new materials well, principals are able to identify and provide feedback to ensure that implementation of lessons from the new program are effective, appropriate assessment tools are shared and used to identify degrees of student learning, and practitioners have permission to modify the program based on useful data resulting from the shared assessments. In addition, the district office would have to ensure that all initiatives are transparently and explicitly aligned, make sense to the people expected to implement them, and do not overload people with too many new skills simultaneously. This means that a whole lot of players from all different departments need to plan and work together on an ongoing basis. Buying materials without attending to the variables described above is a classic fix-the-part approach rather than a systemic approach, which generally does not result in the desired outcome, namely more sophisticated instruction and more robust student learning.

Systems thinkers understand that healthy systems require the various parts of the system to work together. Content coaches in their role as agents of change attempt to understand the interactions in the whole system and use their circles of influence to get the different departments talking to one another in the service of improving student learning across the board.

Hierarchies

In addition, school systems are generally hierarchal in structure. Policy is generated at the top of the pyramid and imposed on those at the lower levels of the pyramid (e.g., classroom teachers) with little or no input from the people who are expected to carry out the policy. Often the very people expected to carry out the new policy do not understand the policy and the reasoning behind it or do not have the skill set to implement it well. In our travels, when we suggest to teachers that they can use their power of influence to talk up the hierarchy, they are often hesitant to do so and fear reprisal. This is a sign of an unhealthy, hierarchical system. Systems thinkers understand that communication must flow in all directions and getting the various players in a system to talk with one another is a very important strategy for improving results. Content coaches understand that as agents of change they are the conduits who mediate between different parts of the system—they connect principals with faculty, principals with district-level supervisors, and teachers with other teachers within and across schools.

Fighting Fragmentation

The present design of school systems causes fragmentation and territoriality, wastes vast amounts of resources, causes burnout, and engenders resistance, compliance, and cynicism. These systems rarely manifest the levels of coherence and collaboration that would produce higher student achievement throughout the system. Attempts to improve the system generally involve tinkering within the present design (such as providing time for people to talk with one another in forums such as grade-level meetings or staff meetings). Often the allotted time set for meetings is inadequate and causes frustration because it is difficult to accomplish any real work in under an hour once a week or month. School systems are not presently designed for adult learning. Content coaches are aware of this tension and work with principals and district-level supervisors to mitigate the obstacles to adult learning. Removing obstacles is an important part of being an agent of change.

Overview of Content Coaching

From our perspective, anyone with expertise in something can coach someone with less expertise. Teachers can coach other teachers, students, or athletic teams. Students can coach each other (e.g., peer coaching) or adults (e.g., in using technology). Principals, when they employ coaching techniques rather than evaluating, can coach too. A coach is **anyone** *whose job description or informal interactions (e.g., collaborative planning with colleagues) involves assisting teachers and/or principals in improving teacher performance, either part-time or full-time, in the service of improving student learning.*

Content coaching requires expertise that goes beyond generic forms of coaching. Similar to other models of coaching, content coaches work on instructional strategies, cultivate relationships, and build trust among faculty members. However, content coaching takes coaching in educational settings further than other forms of coaching. Content coaches center coaching conversations on application of conceptual content knowledge in ways that give all students access to it.

Content coaches know that if students are to learn important and relevant content well, teachers need to focus their lessons on the big ideas, structures, and/or essential questions relevant to the domain under study. Teachers need to deeply understand those ideas and structures and learn to make them accessible to students. Therefore, content coaches have expertise in *at least* two areas: the content they are helping others teach and how children learn that content. Coaches need this expertise to assess levels of teacher and student understanding and ensure teachers have the expertise needed to give all students access to the concepts embedded in the lesson as well as to customize the work with each teacher.

Even though content coaches tend to have expertise in one content area, because we focus on essential components of the instructional core and base our work on research-based learning and intelligence theories, we are able to help teachers rethink and refine their practice in ways that are transferrable from one subject to another.

The Three-Part Cycle

Content coaching is a very specific process that focuses on the instructional core: planning, teaching, reflecting on, and refining lessons. This process includes creating environments conducive to both adult and student learning. Content coaches work one-on-one or in small groups. With small groups of educators, focused around a set of core issues (see Appendix A: Guide to Core Issues), content coaching can have a positive impact on the quality and content of the instructional practices and on the culture in an entire school or district. When it is interwoven with professional learning communities and/or aspects of lesson study it can improve the benefits of both of those professional development practices.

Content coaching uses a three-part cycle—plan, teach, and debrief.

The Preconference: Lesson Planning

As a rule of thumb, content coaches will not work in classrooms without a preconference. We believe it is not only respectful to meet with teachers prior to engaging with them in their classrooms, but essential to find out what they are working on, how their students are doing, and how we can best serve *them*. (The preconference is described in detail through the case study in Chapter 7.)

We emphasize lesson planning because we have found that habits of planning have a significant impact on the successful implementation of the lesson. In our experience, many teachers need to strengthen their capacity to design or adapt lessons to meet the needs of diverse learners and to center lessons on the big ideas or essential questions in the content to be taught. Often the problems that arise in the implementation of a lesson can be traced back to the lesson design. Our ultimate goal is teaching students to think deeply, critically, and creatively when in the process of learning. In order to do so, teachers must think deeply, critically, and creatively when designing lessons.
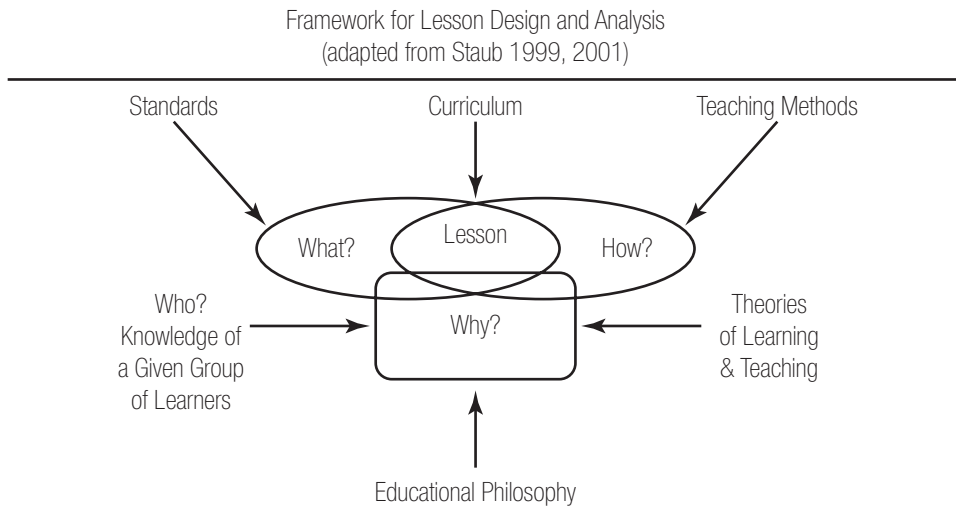
Content coaches co-plan lessons with teachers rather than come into the session with a fully developed lesson. Co-planning honors the principle that people learn best by doing in the

CURRICULUM MATERIALS

Sometimes coaches see their job as helping teachers deliver the next lesson in the book, especially when the district or school adopts a new set of materials. In contrast, content coaches see the teaching of important content, big ideas, and essential questions as their job. We take a questioning stance in relation to the curriculum materials and make informed decisions about how to best use these tools in the service of ensuring all students have access to the content under study. Rather than enforcing a mechanical "fidelity to the curriculum" approach, we believe we should have "fidelity to student learning important and relevant content" and that curriculum materials are tools to be used mindfully.

company of knowledgeable others. One of the critical factors in the success of a lesson is the teacher's depth of understanding of what it is she is trying to teach and why she is implementing the lesson in a particular way. When teachers are unsure or don't "own the design," they tend to have difficulty implementing the lesson as intended. This is true whether they are following a set of curriculum materials or a lesson plan given to them from a colleague or coach. Our goal is for teachers to internalize lesson-planning habits of mind and plan future lessons with more depth and know-how.

Focus on Big Ideas and Essential Questions Content coaching focuses on the big ideas and essential questions to be taught—the what, why, how, and who questions to be explored in lesson design. The diagram below was introduced in *Content-Focused Coaching: Transforming Mathematics Lessons* (West and Staub 2003), and is designed to show how all of these questions interact in relation to the various resources, tools, and philosophies at play in any given lesson.

Framework for Lesson Design and Analysis
(adapted from Staub 1999, 2001)

Standards   Curriculum   Teaching Methods

What?   Lesson   How?

Who?
Knowledge of   Why?   Theories
a Given Group   of Learning
of Learners   & Teaching

Educational Philosophy

Planning Segments of the Lesson Content coaches tend to take teachers on a deep dive into content and focus on specific segments of the lesson. For instance, we might plan the launch in great detail during the preconference and then enact it side-by-side with the teacher during the lesson. We decide on what segment of the lesson to plan (e.g., launch, conferring, summary, minilesson) based on observations of the teacher or on our discussions during which the teacher asks for assistance with a specific part of the lesson. By working on chunks of the lesson, we can build the capacity to implement the whole lesson well over time. The launch is often a good starting place because it requires less skill than the summary conversation, for example. Also, if a lesson gets

off to a good start, the students tend to be more engaged, and the teacher can see immediate positive impact and is generally more willing to then roll up her sleeves to work on the more difficult segments of lesson implementation.

Keeping autonomy in mind, the coach may model the launch for the teacher the first time they work together, but the next time, the coach would encourage the teacher to execute the launch with the coach standing by to guide the process in real time. In this way the coach encourages the teacher to be a learner in the same manner she wants the teacher to encourage students to be learners.

Co-Teaching

Guiding instruction during class is also unique to content coaching. We are not aware of any other coaching models that advocate the coach actively coach during a lesson. In fact, there are some who disagree with this aspect of our practice. Most coaching models generally have the coach take notes during a lesson and then provide feedback. While this is easier for the coach, and may be easier on the teacher, it often does not result in observable changes in teacher practice. By judiciously interjecting at pivotal moments during lessons, content coaches resemble athletic coaches. They are instructing the play during the game in order for the teacher to note and internalize cues for certain teaching moves. The coach also has the opportunity to model specific moves so the teacher can see what that move looks and sounds like in real time with her students.

In our experience, working side-by-side with the teacher during the lesson is a very effective way to encourage the teacher to try new practices at pivotal times during the lesson and allows the coach to provide immediate, actionable feedback. Timely, specific feedback is one of the most effective ways to ensure learning at any age (Hattie and Timperley 2007). The teacher can often act on the feedback and give the practice another try during the same lesson.

For example, teachers often listen *for* what they want students to say rather than listen *to* what students are actually saying. Slowing down the conversation, listening actively, and checking for understanding are all nameable moves that can be identified and worked on during a lesson. When the coach notices that the teacher misheard or skipped over something relevant said by a student, she might say something like, "What Tanisha said is really interesting. I'm wondering if we can have her restate it and see what other students think about her idea." She can then hand the reins back to the teacher, who can work on asking the student to explain her idea and get other students to listen and paraphrase the ideas of a classmate. The teacher can learn to use these critical discourse moves in all content areas. Later, during the postconference, the coach and teacher can explore why the coach made that move in order to highlight the practice of listening to students.

This implies that the coach is in close proximity to the teacher during the lesson. They are working side-by-side. Sometimes coaches model a piece of the lesson or a specific instructional move and then hand the lesson back to the teacher. Sometimes they interject a question into the conversation at hand and sometimes they might play scribe, writing down students' ideas or demonstrate other ways of representing student thinking. The coach is *not* an extra pair of hands working with a small group of students while the teacher works with other students. Teacher and coach work together to learn from and with each other.

There are pitfalls to taking an active role during the lesson. The main pitfall is the tendency on the part of the coach to take over the class. Another potential pitfall is intervening too often or in ways that disrupt the flow of the lesson or change the course of the planned lesson. It is extremely important that the coach and teacher discuss the practice of actively coaching during the lesson and determine to what degree the teacher is open to this practice and what signals and agreements need to be made in order to ensure its success.

We will discuss co-teaching further in Chapter 8.

The Postconference

When the lesson is over, the coach and teacher(s) sit together and think through the lesson in great detail. They examine student work, and think about its implications for tomorrow's lesson. In some cases, where coaching is happening in small groups, an observing teacher may agree to teach the lesson to another group of students incorporating the refinements suggested during this debrief. When teachers teach one subject to multiple classes (e.g., science in middle school) they can retry the lesson in a second class with new insights and refinements brought out during the postconference.

Like all effective coaching models, we view the postconference as an important opportunity to build reflective habits of mind. We also take this opportunity to prioritize a couple of specific things for the teacher to work on until the next coaching session. Usually we provide one process goal (e.g., begin to use turn and talk more often in your lessons) and one content goal (e.g., identify and name the network of related big ideas in this unit and select one or two to highlight in the lesson as part of your plan). Setting one or two doable goals where the new behaviors are observable helps the coach, the teacher, and the principal acknowledge and build on progress.

Our aim in the postconference is to focus on one or two important aspects of teaching that are generalizable and resonate. By this we mean that the strategies are essential and can be applied beyond the one lesson worked on in depth in any given session. Learning to listen well to what students are saying, for example, is a habit worth cultivating across the board.

We look at the postconference in detail in Chapter 9.

Comparing Content Coaching with Other Coaching Models

Content coaching is a powerful form of coaching that has one main purpose: improving instruction to improve student learning. Other coaching models such as instructional coaching, cognitive coaching, and so forth also aim to improve instruction. The underlying values, and some premises, of these three models of coaching (instructional, cognitive, and content) are similar:

- ▸ It is important to build respectful relationships based on trust and willingness to inquire into beliefs and hypotheses;

- ▸ Commitment to professional learning matters and is more likely to occur when we find mutual purpose and co-construct goals.

- ▸ Asking questions rather than providing answers tends to generate more learning.

- ▸ Focusing the coaching conversation at the level of the lesson.

- ▸ We learn by doing the work together.

While all three models aim at improving teacher practice as a means to improve student learning, the difference is in the focus and the processes. Instructional coaches tend to emphasize certain instructional tools and/or processes that have proven to be of benefit to students (e.g., graphic organizers). Cognitive coaches use questioning techniques to help a teacher identify and think through how to accomplish their goals. Content coaches focus on naming and exploring the content to be taught and identify to what degree each student understands it.

Content coaches keep their attention on the instructional core—lesson planning, implementation (co-teaching), and reflection on and refinement of a lesson based on evidence of student learning. We might offer instructional tools similar to instructional coaches and ask questions to ascertain goals or ideas similar to cognitive coaches; however, we believe that we must explicitly name the content to be taught first and foremost in order to ensure an effective lesson. Naming the content to be taught may seem obvious, but in fact, the lack of clarity about what is to be taught is often at the heart of what goes awry in lessons. Often the content identified by the teacher is too narrow, too skills based, and does not center on important concepts, hypotheses, or essential questions.

Content coaching is a proactive model of coaching and content coaches often offer suggestions as well as ask questions. While we totally agree that inquiry is the main practice of coaching, and that learning happens best when people come to their own understanding, we have found that sometimes offering suggestions is necessary. For example,

when teachers don't know their content deeply, or have a very limited repertoire of instructional practices, or are unaware that their present beliefs are actually inhibiting student learning, it is often more productive to offer suggestions than to continue to question. Because we do offer suggestions and help craft a lesson, content coaches take fifty percent responsibility for the success of the lesson they collaboratively plan and co-teach with teachers. We share the decision-making process and the accountability.[1]

Many coaching models use a two-part cycle: observe/debrief or model/debrief. We are aware that some coaching models do include a three-part cycle—talk/model/debrief, but through our conversations with coaches around the country, particularly literacy coaches, the actual process employed in the three-part cycle differs from the process used in content coaching. In some coaching practices, for example, coaches do not engage in lesson planning with the teacher, but share a lesson that has been fully planned by the coach and will be modeled in the classroom. In contrast, content coaches co-create the lesson plan with the teacher.

Modeling lessons is another aspect of the work that differs in content coaching. We may occasionally model a complete lesson for a teacher or group of teachers, but we do so judiciously and encourage teachers to co-teach with us as soon as possible. We want to develop the teacher's skill set as quickly as possible and avoid creating any dependency on the coach. Also, we find that there is so much happening while modeling an entire lesson that it is difficult to focus on important aspects that will inform and improve practice. Teachers need to be able to "name the teaching moves" the coach is making and decipher the cues for using those particular moves in order to then practice using the same moves whether or not the coach is present. We have found that modeling is best done in small doses with specific moves in mind.

Summary

Coaching is a vehicle for developing rigorous planning habits and effective instructional practices across a system. It is not, in and of itself, a panacea. It is a part of the whole. Content coaching in particular attempts to use a systemic approach to upgrading professional practices that result in *evidence of student learning* on a daily basis in any given lesson.

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[1] In talking with Bena Kallick, her colleague Art Costa (a developer of cognitive coaching), and Jim Knight (author of *Instructional Coaching*), we have found that our ideas about coaching are quite similar. However, we have found that people who have studied these coaching models (or even content coaching) often have internalized ideas about those models that were not intended by the authors, such as "Cognitive coaches can never offer a suggestion" or "Content coaches do not work on instructional strategies, management, or culture, just on content." This phenomenon happens in all human attempts to learn from one another and is a natural part of the learning process.

We focus on the instructional core and co-create and assess lessons with our colleagues. Content coaching does not favor one instructional strategy, lesson format, or set of curriculum materials over another. We work at gathering evidence of what works with which students. We focus on building learning communities in which people question the status quo and imagine a learning environment that is compelling and inspiring for adults and children alike. We then partner with our colleagues—administrators and teachers—to create that environment.

In Chapter 2 we turn to creating a powerful coaching initiative designed to get systemic, sustainable, and measurable results.