

LEARNING-FOCUSED COACHING PROTOCOL

Learning-Focused Coaching is a Three-Part Process

1. Pre-lesson Conference
2. Lesson Observation
3. Post-lesson Conference

Critical Features of Learning-Focused Coaching:

This coaching process is intended to encourage reflection, and is not designed for evaluation purposes. More specifically, the role of the coach is not to judge practice, but to gather evidence that can be used to improve instruction. The pre-lesson conference prepares coach and instructor to focus on evidence of student learning through discussing the instructor's goals and determining what it might look like for students to reach these goals or exhibit understanding. During the actual field experience observation, a coach should record (in writing) what instructors and students do and say. The goal is to gather evidence of student learning that can be used to inform instruction. These notes should be as detailed as possible so the post-lesson conference can focus on specific instructional moves and student responses.

While this process is not intended to be evaluative, there is additional space on margins of the template for a coach to make notes about their observations and impressions that can lead to a more meaningful coaching session—these notes should be focused on information the instructor couldn't get just by reading a transcription of what was said during the lesson. This could take the form of a quick note indicating student behavior, questioning why an instructional decision was made, or highlighting a distinctive moment of instruction.

The post-lesson conference discussion should focus on the evidence of student learning and should begin with a discussion of the data the coach gathered and move towards planning future goals for the instructor. The role of a coach is to refrain from evaluation and to facilitate reflection on lesson design, teaching practices, and the student learning that resulted. Ideally, the coaching process should take place multiple times throughout the course of a season so an instructor can have support in creating and moving towards goals.

Learning-Focused Coaching is:

- Student-Centered: Places an emphasis on collecting evidence of student learning in order to help instructors to design and implement lessons that provide experiences and opportunities that best support students.
- Goal Specific: Lesson plans and teaching moves are discussed in terms of students learning particular kinds of skills and concepts, with a focus on the role that discussion plays in meaning-making in science.
- Builds Instructor Capacity to Reflective: Enriches and refines instructors' pedagogical content knowledge, particularly around best practices with teaching science in outdoor settings.

PART ONE: PRE-LESSON CONFERENCE

Goal:

Instructor and Coach develop a shared view of the lesson's purpose, flow, and potential challenges. Together they decide on the evidence the coach will collect during the observed lesson. Note that this is not a time to revise the lesson.

Time:

At least 30 minutes (whenever possible, a longer conference is desirable)

Materials:

Copies of the lesson plan for the coach and the instructor, and the Pre-Lesson Conference tool. (note: it can sometimes be helpful to have nametags for students).

Description:

The instructor explains the goals of the lesson and how students will show they've achieved them. The coach should have a copy of the lesson plan so the instructor does not need to explain the lesson verbally. The coach and instructor should use the Pre-Lesson Conference tool as they discuss and reach a common understanding about:

1. What students will know and be able to do by the end of the lesson.
2. How to know if students are learning. What will that learning look or sound like?
3. Strategies to make student's thinking and understanding public, building understanding through discussion. (See BEETLES Instructor Support For Guiding Exploration and Instructor Support For Leading Meaning-Making Discussions)
4. Strategies to advance academic language development, language of argumentation, etc.
5. What students will do at each phase of the learning cycle in the lesson.
6. The evidence of student understanding the coach will collect and how they will collect that data.

The more clarity you get in the pre-lesson conference about the lesson purpose and about what student success will look and sound like, the easier it is to collect evidence of student understanding and the more likely it is that the lesson will be effective.

Pre-Lesson Conference Do's and Don'ts

- | Do | Don't |
|---|---|
| - Work hard to understand the instructor's goal and plan for the lesson. | - Tell the instructor how to teach the lesson. |
| - Ask questions to help the instructor clarify their plan. | - Begin the lesson observation with only a general or vague idea of an instructor's goal. |
| - Take the time to discuss and teach the science if necessary. | - Assume they have a deep understanding of the topic or they will brush up on it before teaching. |
| - Question aspects of lesson design you think won't result in student learning. | - Keep quiet over bad lesson design for fear of hurting and instructor's feelings. |
| - Make sure you and the instructor know and agree upon your role during the lesson. | - Assume that any action you take during a lesson will be okay with the instructor. |

PART TWO: LESSON OBSERVATION

Goal:

The overall purpose of coaching is to help teachers design and deliver effective lessons and become more reflective about their practice. A lesson is effective if the students learn. Therefore, the primary observation focus should be collecting evidence of student learning. What did students say or do to indicate their understanding (or misunderstanding)? What did the teacher say or do to uncover or push on student understanding?

Time:

A typical lesson period – 30-45 minutes.

Materials:

Lesson plan, the Observation Notes tool, a completed Pre-Lesson Conference tool. (note: it can sometimes be helpful to have nametags for students).

Description:

The coach's focus in the lesson observation is student learning. During the lesson, the observer should be looking for and writing down any evidence of student understanding (and misunderstanding) on the Observation Notes tool. The coach should try to capture what students are saying and doing, as well as the teacher moves that uncover, redirect or advance student thinking. The coach is collecting data, not evaluating the instructor's practice. During the lesson, the coach should avoid stepping in and acting as additional teachers. Instead, they should put on their research hats and focus on collecting data. Generally, it is only appropriate to ask a student a question if it will generate better evidence to bring back to the instructor during the post-lesson conference (and if it doesn't interfere with the instructor's implementation of the lesson).

Before the lesson begins, students should be told that the coach (and any other observers) is there to learn about how students think about the content of the lesson; and will be writing notes about what they see the instructor and students doing, and what they hear the instructor and students saying during the lesson. The coach will NOT be acting as an additional teacher, helping students during the lesson; or evaluating the students or the instructor.

Lesson Observation Do's and Don'ts

Do

- Focus on evidence of student understanding.
- Take copious and detailed notes of observable data (i.e. instructor's and students' words and questions)
- Listen carefully to students
- Act as a researcher during the lesson by collecting data about student learning.
- Model good listening for the group.

Don't

- Make assumptions about student learning without evidence to back it up.
- Think you'll remember what is said, or record only your impressions instead of actual dialogue.
- Think about how you would teach the lesson differently.
- Act as an additional instructor during the lesson.
- Talk to students or chaperones while the instructor is speaking, or talk to the instructor during activities.

PART THREE: POST-LESSON CONFERENCE

Goal:

To discuss evidence of student learning and the impact of lesson design and teacher moves on students.

Time:

At least 30 minutes (whenever possible, a longer conference is desirable)

Materials:

Copies of the lesson plan for the coach and the instructor, the completed Lesson Observation Notes tool, and the Post-Lesson Conference tool.

Description:

This discussion should be guided by the questions from Post-Lesson Conference tool, and it should be grounded in evidence of student learning since that is the ultimate determinant of an effective lesson. The coach's role is to help the instructor to reflect on the extent to which students gained the understandings, strategies, concepts, skills, and academic language the lesson was designed to teach. To the extent that student learning didn't take place or that there is no evidence of learning, the conversation will naturally turn to challenges that came up during the lesson and /or lesson design and implementation.

Post-lesson conferences start with a discussion of the data collected by the coach. Also valuable is analysis of student work artifacts (i.e. individual student journal writing; charts or whiteboard solutions generated by students; quotes from student conversations). The purpose is to find evidence of student understanding and misunderstanding. This leads to identifying instructor moves that supported student learning, as well as problem solving around trouble spots for students. If there was no evidence of student thinking, then the conversation will naturally focus on teaching strategies that make public student thinking. Or, it may be the case that during the post-lesson conference the coach and instructor discover they were not exactly sure what evidence of student thinking would look like, and thus they will become clearer on what it looks like for students to understand a particular concept or be able to perform a particular skill or use academic language. These conferences should end with a summary of what the instructor is taking away from the coaching experience and an agreement on next steps for both the instructor and coach.

Post-Lesson Conference Do's and Don'ts

Do

- Focus on evidence of student understanding (or misunderstanding) and how it relates to goals discussed in the pre-lesson conference.
- Share your notes with the instructor
- Ground your comments in observable data.
- Share what you learned from your observations.
- Reflect how take-aways might affect future goals and instructional decisions.

Don't

- Make evaluative comments about the instructor.
- Share your notes with anyone else!
- Assume your interpretation of what happened is the only truth or interpretation.
- Assume that the only person who is learning from this experience is the instructor.
- End the coaching session without reflecting on and voicing future goals.