
Introduction

Why This Book? Why Now?

For over a decade, I have been fortunate to work with teachers, coaches, principals, and district leaders from around the country. 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-Centered 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 center. By focusing coaching on specific goals for student learning, rather than on changing or fixing teachers, a coach can navigate directly toward a measurable impact and increased student achievement. Coaches are still busy, but now their efforts are targeted and aligned toward 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-centered coaching model.

Who Am I?

My journey began as a classroom teacher in an urban elementary 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 favorite things about this book is the diverse array of educators that fill its pages. You will read about school districts that are rural, urban, suburban, large, small, and somewhere in between. You will be introduced to school-based coaches who support literacy, math, 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 customizing and tinkering with the ideas and tools to make them work in your own setting.

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

student-centered coaching up and running in your own school or district. 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-centered 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-centered. 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 districts 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 . . .