

Strong Connections: Building Teacher-Coach Relationships

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Essential Question(s)

How can coaches build trusting and collaborative relationships with teachers that foster professional growth for teacher and student success?

Summary

This professional development session equips instructional coaches with the necessary strategies to build strong, trusting relationships with their teachers. This session emphasizes relationship building using communication like active listening and constructive conversation. Instructional coaches will learn how to adapt their approach to meet individual teachers' needs and foster a collaborative, supportive environment. Coaches will learn how strengthening these relationships will allow them to more effectively guide teachers' professional growth and enhance student learning outcomes by analyzing teacher case studies, applying the Authenticity Framework, and reflecting on the coach-teacher relationship.

Learning Goals

Standards

InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards (K-12th)

9b: The teacher engages in meaningful and appropriate professional learning experiences aligned with his/her own needs and the needs of the learners, school, and system.
9c: Independently and in collaboration with colleagues, the teacher uses a variety of data (e.g., systematic observation, information about learners, research) to evaluate the outcomes of teaching and learning and to adapt planning and practice.
10f: The teacher engages in professional learning, contributes to the knowledge and skill of others, and works collaboratively to advance professional practice

Attachments

- Case Studies for Instructional Coaching—Strong Connections.docx
- Case Studies for Instructional Coaching—Strong Connections.pdf
- Coaching Sentence Stems—Strong Connections.pdf
- I Notice, I Wonder—Strong Connections.docx
- I Notice, I Wonder—Strong Connections.pdf
- Instructional Strategy Note Catcher—Strong Connections.docx
- Instructional Strategy Note Catcher—Strong Connections.pdf
- Mirror, Microscope, Binoculars Reflection—Stong Connections.docx
- Mirror, Microscope, Binoculars Reflection—Stong Connections.pdf
- Presentation Slides—Strong Connections.pptx

Materials

- Presentation Slides (attached)
- I Notice, I Wonder handout (attached; one third of a page per participant)
- Coaching Sentence Stems handout (attached; one per participant; print two-sided)
- Case Study for Instructional Coaching handout (attached; one page of the handout per group)
- Mirror, Microscope, Binoculars handout (attached; one half-sheet per participant)
- Instructional Strategy Note Catcher (attached; one per participant)
- Laptop or tablet
- Chart paper
- FlipChart markers

Preparation

In the Explore phase of this session, participants will practice the Four Corners instructional strategy, which will require some prep before the session.

Write each of the four questions below on a different sheet of chart paper:

- What concerns or challenges do you anticipate in your coaching relationships?
- How do you adapt your coaching approach to meet the needs of teachers with different personalities, communication styles, and preferences?
- When working with teachers who have different personalities, what strategies help you build trust and foster positive relationships with them?
- How do you want teachers to remember you based on their experiences working with you as a coach?

Hang each sheet of chart paper in a different corner of the room.

10 minutes

Engage

Use the attached **Presentation Slides** to facilitate the session. Display **slide 2** and introduce the topic of the session. Transition through **slides 3–4** and share the essential question and learning objectives.

Move to **slide 5**. Give each participant one copy of the attached **I Notice, I Wonder** handout and introduce the I Notice, I Wonder instructional strategy. Ask participants to record things they notice and wonder in response to the following questions on the handout as they watch the video:

- How do the builders help the client make decisions?
- How do the builders encourage the client to focus and revise her plans?
- How do the builders give the client choices?
- How do the builders use what is already there to create something new?
- How do the builders celebrate with the client?

Display **slide 6** and play the video from HGTV on the slide, *Thinking of the Future | 100 Day Dream Home*. After the video, show **slide 7**, which includes the questions and facilitate a group discussion. Ask participants to share out what they noticed and wondered in relation to the questions on their handouts.

15 minutes

Explore

Display **slide 8** and introduce participants to the Four Corners instructional strategy. Move through **slides 9–12** to introduce the questions present in each corner to participants. Share with participants that each question is written on a different chart paper, each of which is posted in a different corner of the room. After all questions have been introduced, have participants go to the corner of the room with the question they are most interested in exploring.

Have participants in each corner group discuss the question in their corner. Tell participants that, as they discuss, they should have one person act as a scribe and record important discussion points on the provided chart paper. Allow participants approximately five minutes to discuss and record their thoughts.

Have participants choose a different question and move to that corner of the room. Have them repeat the discussion process with their new group, adding and responding to the existing notes on the chart paper. Allow approximately four minutes for this second round.

Transition to **slide 13** and have participants return to their original question. Have them read their peers' ideas, star the top three comments, and choose a spokesperson for their group. Invite each spokesperson to share out important points from their poster.

If time permits, have participants complete a Gallery Walk to read each poster around the room.

Optional Slido Integration

If you would like to highlight a new tech tool or complete the Four Corners activity digitally, consider using the Slido tech tool. Use the instructions provided on the tech tool card to create a presentation. Select the "Open text" option and and add one question per slide. Allow participants to respond to the one they are most interested in exploring. Once everyone has had time to submit, share the responses and facilitate a group discussion.

10 minutes

Explain

Display **slide 14**. Discuss Aguilar's ten steps to building trust. Particularly highlight the four that will be featured in this session, which are listed below:

- Connect: Build rapport
- Listen: Pay attention to body language
- Ask questions: Gain understanding
- Validate: Paraphrase discussion, respond with sentence stems

Move to **slide 15**. Share the information on rapport, and highlight that developing rapport helps remove perceived threats in a coaching relationship.

Display **slide 16** and share the information on what rapport looks like. Share how mirroring can help bolster rapport. Encourage participants to practice these strategies with an Elbow Partner. Provide questions for discussion and allow them one minute each to practice the strategies.

Sample Discussion Questions

- What is your favorite self-care activity?
- What's one thing that has gone well for you this week?
- If you could have any superpower as a coach, what would it be?
- What is one thing that always motivates you at work?

Show **slide 17** and share the quote from Stephan Covey. Let participants know that one of the major steps to creating rapport is listening.

Transition to **slide 18** and share additional information on listening, including the differences between *active listening* and *"I" listening*. Tell participants that active listening creates a space for coaches to intentionally understand the strengths, needs, and perspectives of each mentee. Share that the tips on the slide support meaningful dialogue to aid effective growth.

Display **slide 19** and introduce the information on *paraphrasing* during a coaching conversation. Let participants know that paraphrasing is a way to check understanding and clarify information by repeating back what you heard in your own words. Once again, allow participants time to practice these strategies with an Elbow Partner. Provide them questions for discussion, similar to the ones listed above, and allow them one minute each to practice.

Move to **slide 20**. Share the list of sentence stems that can be used to help paraphrase information during a conversation. Explain that sentence stems serve as a starting point for paraphrasing in a coaching setting. Distribute the attached **Coaching Sentence Stems** handout to participants and inform them that they will use this handout for the next activity.

20 minutes

Extend

Use the SORT tech tool to organize participants into groups of three. Display **slide 21** and pass out the **Case Studies for Instructional Coaching** handout. Ask participants to select one case study and, as a group, read only the teacher profile. Have those assuming the role of the instructional coach review the entire case study so they know the goals they must achieve by the end of the meeting with their teacher. Allow them time to read, then move to **slide 22** and introduce the three roles they will assume: teacher, instructional coach, and observer.

For the first round, have each group member assume a role. The person playing the teacher and the person playing the instructional coach will play the roles of each represented in their selected scenario from the Case Studies for Instructional Coaching handout. The person playing the instructional coach should coach the teacher into finding a solution for the scenario. The person playing the role of the observer should jot down any feedback they would like to share with the coach.

Allow approximately ten minutes for the first scenario, then have participants switch roles and repeat the process to act out the same scenario. Once again, allow ten minutes for them to role play. Have participants then switch a third time, so each participant has the opportunity to play each role. After the final ten minutes, have each person share their feedback from their time as an observer with each instructional coach.

10 minutes

Evaluate

Display **slide 23** and pass out **Mirror, Microscope, and Binoculars** handout. Introduce participants to the Mirror, Microscope, Binoculars instructional strategy and ask them to reflect on their experience during today's session by individually responding to the following prompts on their handouts:

- **Mirror (self-reflection):** How has this experience changed my thinking?
- **Microscope (close inspection):** Now I see that I need to work on...
- **Binoculars (global reflection):** What could be done to implement change and improve the coaching process for my teachers?

Alternative Response Methods

If you would like to collect participants' responses, consider creating a Padlet so responses may be saved digitally, organizing a board where participants can place sticky notes, or distributing individual note cards for responses.

As participants reflect, pass out one copy of the attached **Instructional Strategy Note Catcher** handout to each participant. Invite participants to fill in the first column by reflecting on the strategies that were used in this session and the second column with how they might incorporate these strategies with their teachers.

If time permits, invite participants to share out their ideas from the second column.

Research Rationale

Building strong relationships is central to effective instructional coaching because relationships establish the trust necessary for teachers to engage meaningfully in reflection and growth. Collaborative inquiry between coach and teacher provides opportunities to analyze instructional strategies and student outcomes, and authentic, open-ended dialogue pinpoints strengths and areas for improvement (Motto, 2021). When goals are set to align with teachers' professional aspirations and classroom needs, commitment and motivation increase, and reflection fosters the transformative shifts necessary for both individual and collective growth (Munson, 2021; Saclarides, 2022; Moore & Williamson, 2023). Research confirms that relationship-centered coaching not only supports teacher development and adoption of new practices, but also strengthens student learning through deeper understanding, engagement, and measurable achievement gains (Walsh et al., 2020; Witherspoon et al., 2021; Knight & Skrtic, 2021).

Resources

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