Using Pre-Conference for Teacher Reflection

During coaching workshops this week I modeled pre-conferences several times. In each of the cases teacher reflection led to establishing an observation focus that the teacher did not have in mind at the start of conferencing.
Reflecting on my practice I identified two processes that "pushed" teachers' thinking.

#1 Student Behaviors-

Common questions that I use in a pre-conference ask the teacher to identify the student behaviors that will be necessary to obtain in order to achieve the student learning outcomes.
In one conference this week I asked a social studies teacher what student behaviors she needed to generate. She stated that she wanted the students to "understand" George Washington's strategies and how later presidents did or did not follow Washington's approach. I stated that "understanding" was a learning outcome. Then repeated the original question, "What do you need students to do that will lead to 'understanding'?".
Now the teacher began to sequence the lesson; she was going to present information, students would then read and discuss in groups, and finally create a foldabale to illustrate comparisons.
I then asked where she expected the "understanding" to occur. She guessed that it would be after reading and discussing, before making the foldable.
I then asked again what did the students need to do while reading and discussing that would produce understanding and the teacher replied, "Question…themselves and each other."
When I asked the teacher to focus my observation, she requested that I listen to the student discussions after they had read. She believed the data I collected would assist her in knowing if her presentation and reading initiated the questioning (thinking) that would produce understanding.

#2 Predicting Outcomes-

In a pre-conference with a science teacher I learned that he

wanted me to observe an inquiry-based lesson. He shared his excitement for the engagement that he was getting from his students as they experienced more inquiry-based learning activities.
He described for me the participatory behaviors he wanted to elicit from the students. I asked him what percent of the students he felt would exhibit the desired learning behaviors. He said that there were only two students to whom he would have to provide great support to keep engaged in learning. He also shared the strategies he had in mind to assist those students.
I then asked if he would predict from the remaining students a group with high practice of inquiry and a group of less effective practice. He said he thought that 15 students would be high, leaving 8 in the less effective group. When I asked what his strategies would be for the 8, he repeated how he would support the two unlikely to participate without his effort. As I questioned more about what the 8 needed he identified probing questions and calling on them when they were not volunteering.
When I requested a focus for my observation the teacher asked that I track the engagement of the 8 and how he involved and supported them. He would give me a seating map with the 8 students highlighted.
When we debriefed the pre-conference with the class participants the teacher shared that prior to the conference he really had not considered/planned for strategies for the 8. He felt that the reflection of the conference would create a conscious teacher focus during instruction.
A coach's focus on student behaviors and asking for teacher prediction can increase the teacher's reflection.