Which Model of Coaching Is The Right Choice?

This past week I was asked this question in two different settings. A possible future client was interviewing me on a phone call to explore "the fit" for me to be a trainer/coach for administrators and teacher leaders who would work in coaching roles to increase student success by increasing teachers' skills. I was told that the district had held cognitive coaching training and he wanted to know if my model might contradict the previous training. (Arthur Costa and Robert Garmston created *Cognitive Coaching* in 1984.)

Later in the week in a district where I have been consulting and providing coaching training for over a year, a central office administrator said that some people had requested clarity on what was "our model of coaching."

In the first case, I responded to the interviewer that in my training for coaching I focused on exploring the complexity of teaching and learning and the verbal skills of coaching. I was comfortable that someone taking a strong cognitive approach to their coaching would find much in the training to be applicable. At the same time I was offering skills that might allow a change in the coach's approach when they weren't feeling successful. He responded that was interesting as some administrators and coaches were raising concerns about their effectiveness.

I approach many models on a continuum rather than one or the other.

Technical_____Cognitive

At the far left the coach provides specific, sometimes corrective feedback on a skill the teacher has chosen to focus upon. (I just completed a day of media training and was coached on answering reporters' questions…highly technical feedback on the strategies in the training which I was consciously practicing.)

At the far right the coach uses mostly questions and specific

observed data that the teacher has requested…. little or maybe no approval from the coach or suggestions from the coach. (At lunch after the training the media consultant's coaching became much more cognitive having staff explore our thinking about what might be best strategies for us.)

In the second case I presented the principals and coaches with several coaching scenarios which were present in the training they have had and the practices the district had implemented. In addition to the technical——cognitive continuum we explored:

Supervisors___Instructional Coaches____Mentors____Peers

(All of these positions are being asked to take on increasing coaching roles.)

Expert_____Eyes, Ears, Skin

(Sometimes a teacher wants a coach with expertise: someone who can tell and show me how to do it. Other times a teacher wants someone who records what is happening and lets her figure out the meaning and direction.)

The purpose of coaching could be technical, collegial, or challenge.(Garmston; **How Administrators Support Peer Coaching**)

Explored in an earlier blog…

Consider **technical coaching** most commonly connected to staff development. This is the follow up coaching that is needed when teachers take new skills back to the classroom to integrate into their existing practice. We are all familiar with how our best intentions to implement new learning can be lost without coaching support, reinforcement and celebrations of persistence.

I connect **collegial coaching** to the development of teacher relationships. In other words, what we are coaching may be less critical than the fact that staff are getting to know each other and our programs through peer observation and conversation and establishing a reflective coaching culture within the team and school.

Peer coaching in Switzerland

Challenge Coaching is helpful when teachers want to work together to create a new opportunity or solve a problem. Grade level or department teachers can use challenge coaching to tackle a standard that is troubling a number of students or create a plan for a disruptive student that they share….observing in each other's classrooms and reflecting and problem solving. (A natural extension of PLCs)

Peer coaching in Maryland

Coaching is a culture….. a process we use to accomplish important things.

How about a non-model of coaching? How about the coach being skilled to detect the type of coaching being sought by the teacher and respectfully delivering? As coaches' skills grow they can often assist the teacher in identifying what type of coaching is most likely to support the teacher growth need to support student achievement.