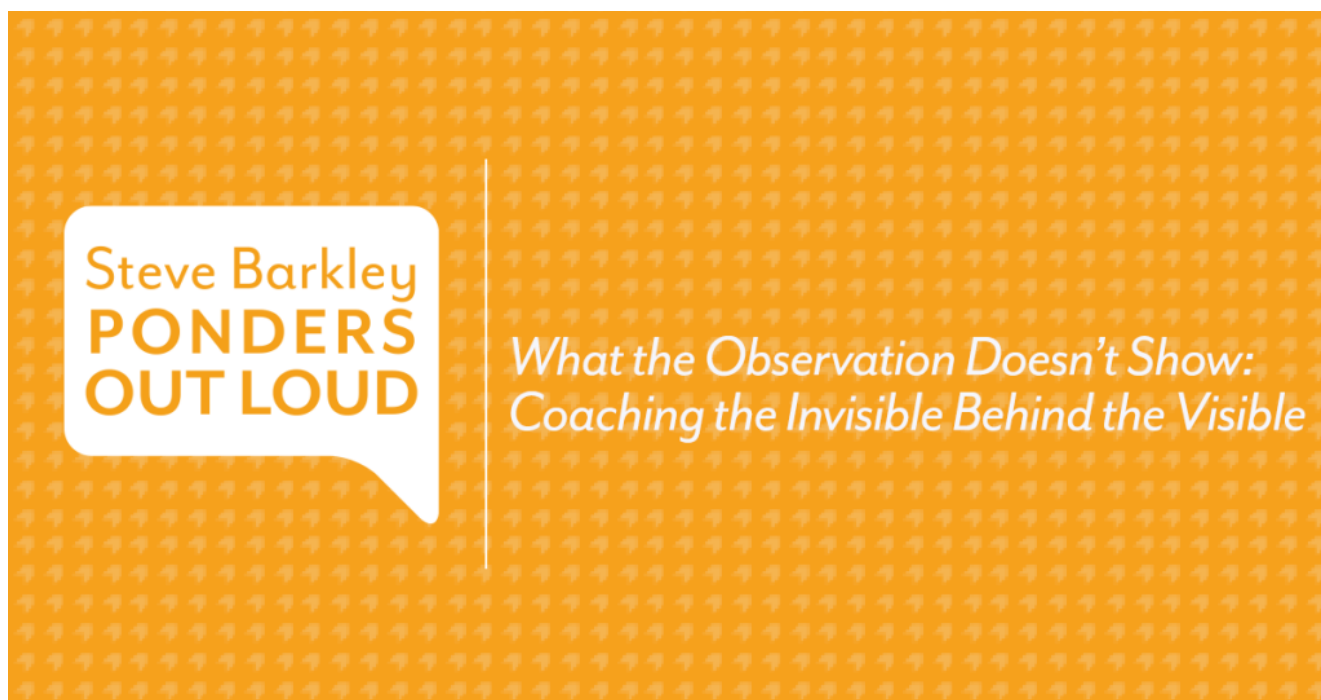


Podcast: What the Observation Doesn't Show – Coaching the Invisible Behind the Visible



When we enter a coaching conversation, we need to consider two layers. One is visible: the lesson design, the teacher's actions, student participation, questions and responses, and evidence of learning. The other is less visible. It includes the teacher's beliefs and assumptions, confidence and uncertainty, previous experiences, fears and concerns, values and intentions, sense of responsibility, and hopes for students – an “invisible thread.” -(Randi Brown)

[Read Randi Brown's article, "Supporting Teacher Growth Through Trusting Relationships"](#)

[Find Joellen Killion's insights on Heavy Coaching in this previous blog.](#)

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Podcast Transcript:

[00:00:00.340] – Steve [Intro]

Welcome to the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. As instructional coaches and school leaders, you are tasked with guiding continuous teacher growth to create student success. This podcast looks to support you with strategies from experienced guests, as well as my own insights that I've gathered over the years. I'm thrilled to have you with us. Thanks for tuning in.

[00:00:29.760] – Steve

What the Observation Doesn't Show: Coaching the Invisible Behind the Visible. A classroom observation gives us access to what happened. Coaching requires curiosity about what sits behind what happened. When I provide training in coaching skills, I stress the importance of understanding the teacher's agenda before an observation. The teacher's agenda includes more than the instructional plan, the desired student learning behaviors, and the intended learning outcomes. It also includes the thinking and the person behind the plan. A teacher's decisions may be influenced by what they believe about teaching and learning, what they value for their students, the confidence they have in themselves and in their learners, and experiences that have shaped their practice. Some of that thinking may be readily expressed. Some of it may emerge only as the teacher reflects and the coach keeps listening and finding out.

[00:01:46.520] – Steve

I describe my goal in a pre-observation conference this way: I want to be able to observe the lesson first through the teacher's eyes before I observe it through my own. I may never see everything the teacher sees, but the more I understand what matters to the teacher and what has shaped their choices, the less likely I am to impose my own meaning on what I observed. Randi Brown reinforced that thinking for me in an Edutopia article titled, "Supporting Teacher Growth Through

Trusting Relationships. She writes, "Every classroom is its own small ecosystem, and the teacher is at the center of that ecosystem. Their experiences, confidence, fears, values, heartbreaks, and sense of purpose quietly shape everything that grows within it. Students don't simply respond to instruction. They respond to the human being leading the room." That requires me as a coach to know something about the human being leading the room. Brown suggests that when we enter a coaching conversation, we consider 2 layers. One is visible. The lesson design, the teacher's actions, student participation, questions and responses, and the evidence of learning. The other is less visible. It includes the teacher's beliefs and assumptions, confidence and uncertainty, previous experiences, fears and concerns, values and intentions, sense of responsibility, and hopes for the student.

[00:03:46.090] – Steve

Brown calls this second layer the invisible thread. We observe the visible thread, but we coach at the intersection of the visible and the invisible. Consider an example. A coach observes a teacher asking questions designed to uncover what students recall from previous lessons. Understanding that's going to be important for today's learning. After only a few seconds of silence following a question, the teacher calls on a student. When the student hesitates, the teacher rephrases the question and then supplies much of the answer. This pattern occurs several times before the teacher introduces the new learning. The coach can accurately record each of those actions, but the observation alone does not reveal what is driving them. The teacher may be worried that students are confused. Silence may cause the teacher to feel that the lesson is unsuccessful. The teacher may be trying to protect students from embarrassment. Previous attempts at waiting may have led to disengagement. The teacher may doubt that students will respond without prompting, or the teacher may be feeling pressure to cover everything planned for the day's lesson. The visible behavior is real, but the meaning is not self-evident.

That meaning is unlikely to be uncovered by directly asking the teacher to explain their beliefs, fears, or past experiences.

[00:05:39.860] – Steve

The invisible thread tends to emerge more gradually in the stories that the teacher tells, the concerns that they repeat, the choices that they defend, the possibilities that energize them. And the risk they hesitate to take. The coach's observation notes tell us what occurred. Listening to the teacher helps us explore why it occurred and what the teacher might want to do next. Observation produces evidence. Conversation produces meaning. Consider how a conversation might unfold following the observation in which the teacher gave students only 2 or 3 seconds to respond. The coach might begin: You asked me to pay attention to how students responded as you checked their understanding from the earlier lessons. What did you notice?

[00:06:45.650] – Teacher

They didn't seem to remember very much. I had to keep prompting them and almost pull the answers out of them.

[00:06:52.990] – Steve

Their silence suggested to you that they weren't recalling the earlier learning?

[00:06:58.390] – Teacher

Yes. When no one answers, I assume either they don't know or that my question wasn't clear, and that's why I rephrase it.

[00:07:07.240] – Steve

So when the students don't respond, you're feeling a responsibility to do something that gets the lesson moving again?

[00:07:16.230] – Teacher

I do. I'm conscious of how much I need to cover, and I don't want the lesson to stall before we even get into the new

material.

[00:07:25.610] – Steve

So waiting actually creates 2 concerns for you: that students may not understand and that you may not get to the new learning that you've got planned.

[00:07:36.130] – Teacher

Exactly.

[00:07:38.180] – Steve

Would you like to hear something that I noticed as you were waiting?

[00:07:42.780] – Teacher

Sure.

[00:07:44.370] – Steve

Most of your pauses were about 2 or 3 seconds. Twice I noticed students beginning to raise their hands just as you started rephrasing the questions. I'm wondering what you make of that.

[00:08:00.010] – Teacher

Hmm, perhaps I'm reading their silence too quickly. They may be thinking, and I'm interpreting it as not knowing.

[00:08:09.250] – Steve

Yeah, silence might mean that they don't know, but it might also mean that they're processing.

[00:08:16.660] – Teacher

Yes, and they may have learned that they don't need to struggle very long because I'll eventually give them enough of an answer.

[00:08:24.920] – Steve

So you're wondering whether your efforts to keep the lesson moving might unintentionally be reducing the thinking students need to do.

[00:08:36.480] – Teacher

That's uncomfortable to consider, but probably true. I've always felt that keeping the discussion moving was my responsibility.

[00:08:46.940] – Steve

Stepping back may require you to sit with some discomfort while students discover that you aren't going to do the thinking for them.

[00:08:56.340] – Teacher

They may need to become comfortable with that discomfort too.

[00:09:01.510] – Steve

What might you want to try?

[00:09:04.290] – Teacher

Well, I could let the silence last longer. I might ask students to just jot down what they remembered or talk to a partner before responding. I could also tell them why I'm changing what I do.

[00:09:18.580] – Steve

What might I observe as you try that?

[00:09:22.650] – Teacher

Watch what the students do during the silence. Do they begin writing, look back at their materials, signal that they're ready, or turn to a classmate and see whether more students contribute without me pulling the answers from them.

[00:09:39.100] – Steve

The invisible thread wasn't apparent from the observation alone. The coach could see that the teacher usually waited only 2 or 3 seconds, frequently rephrased questions, and sometimes supplied the answers herself. The conversation revealed what the observation could not. The teacher was interpreting silence as confusion, felt responsible for maintaining the lesson's momentum, and worried about covering

the planned learning. As the conversation continued, the teacher began to question whether her efforts to help students might actually be reducing their responsibility for thinking. The coach didn't diagnose that belief or confront the teacher with it. Careful listening, paraphrasing and relevant observation evidence allowed the teacher to uncover it herself. Trust is necessary for coaching to have an impact. At the same time, trust grows through experiences like this. When teachers experience the coach seeking to understand before responding. Joellen Killian's distinction between light and heavy coaching provides an interesting lens for examining this conversation. Light coaching tends to focus on support, resources, encouragement, and assistance. Heavy coaching pushes more directly toward examining beliefs, assumptions, decisions, and their impact on student learning. The coach is supportive throughout this conversation, but the coaching becomes heavier when the teacher begins examining her belief about responsibility and the possible effect of her choices on students.

[00:11:53.950] – Steve

Support and challenge are not opposites. Support makes the challenge possible. The teacher's willingness to examine an uncomfortable possibility is evidence of trust, and the coach's response to that vulnerability can deepen the trust further. The decision is not whether light or heavy coaching is better. The decision is what will best support the teacher's learning at this moment. An earlier question for the coach might be, what do I know, and what do I still need to find out about this teacher? That kind of knowing isn't established in a single pre-conference or coaching cycle. It develops as the coach keeps finding out. Each conversation provides another opportunity to discover what the teacher values, what they are working toward, what concerns them, where they feel confident, where are they uncertain, and what they may be ready to question. Each time a teacher experiences a coach seeking to understand before responding, another piece

of the invisible thread becomes visible and trust grows. A classroom observation gives us access to what happened. Knowing the teacher helps us explore what sits behind what happened and what might happen next. Observe what is visible. Stay curious about what is invisible. Coaching begins with knowing, and knowing begins and continues with finding out.

[00:13:57.270] – Steve

As you enter your next coaching observation and conference, consider how the invisible thread combines with the visual to maximize your understanding that guides your coaching support. Reach me at barkleypd.com with your questions or insights. Links to Killian's and Brown's articles are in the podcast lead-in. And as always, thanks for listening.

[00:14:26.770] – Steve [Outro]

Thanks for listening, folks. I'd love to hear what you're pondering. You can find me on Twitter or LinkedIn @SteveBarkley, or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.

Podcast:
Resistance

Redefining



Steve Barkley
PONDER'S
OUT LOUD

Redefining Resistance

"Resistance isn't refusal. It's a signal of unmet needs."
Becca Silver, the founder of The Whole Educator and the designer of the Resistance Remedy, shares how to diagnosis common unmet needs. Coaches questioning and listening emerges as key to change and commitment.

[Visit The Whole Educator website and get in touch with Becca here.](#)

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Podcast Transcript:

[00:00:00.300] – Steve [Intro]

Welcome to the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. As instructional coaches and school leaders, you are tasked with guiding continuous teacher growth to create student success. This podcast looks to support you with strategies from experienced guests, as well as my own insights that I've gathered over the years. I'm thrilled to have you with us. Thanks for tuning in.

[00:00:29.700] – Steve

Redefining resistance. Joining our podcast today as Becca Silver, the founder of, "The Whole Educator" and the designer of, "The Resistance Remedy." Becca hosts the "Coaching The Whole Educator Podcast" where she breaks down the messiness of adult, learning and change leadership into practical and doable next steps. I had the privilege of being Becca's guests on her podcast earlier.

[00:00:59.400] – Steve

I'm really excited to have her join us here. Becca Silver helps school leaders, district leaders, and instructional coaches to do one of the hardest things in education – lead people through resistance, beyond buy-in and into real commitment. With two decades in education, she's worked with thousands of Educators and leaders across the US and internationally. Welcome Becca. I'm just really excited to have you on the podcast.

[00:01:35.600] – Becca

Thank you. Excited to be here, Steve. I love talking to you and I love how our conversations like you say, just don't seem to end and so excited to talk with you on your podcast today.

[00:01:47.000] – Steve

Well and the the whole topic of looking at resistance and how people look at resistance to find it address it, I think that's a biggie.

[00:01:59.500] – Steve

So questions about resistance emerge rather quickly when you engage in conversations with coaches, middle level leaders and school administrators. Why is that such a pressing topic?

[00:02:14.100] – Becca

Well, I think so, first of all, there's a big – Peter Block, who's a bit, a kind of a big voice in the Consulting world, right? He has this quote that I use all the time, which is, "when we have changed, we have to expect resistance."

[00:02:29.600] – Becca

I would say they're besties. They come together, right? And so one thing we can always expect schools to have is change. Schools will always be changing will always be improving. And yet when change happens, we often get like frustrated or surprised by the resistance instead of being proactive and expecting it. So one thing is, when change happens, expect resistance will happen too.

[00:02:59.700] – Becca

It's so funny because we kind of create this situation. We the people we hire are the people we want to hire are critical thinkers. We interview our teachers, where we're talking to people and one of the things we're listening for and looking for, in the quality of the teachers were bringing into our schools, is we want them to think critically about what's going on in their classrooms. You know, who can they differentiate for for students? Can they adapt a lesson plan on the fly?

[00:03:29.900] – Becca

And yet, when a change comes down the pipeline that they didn't choose, they're expected to comply with it and some teachers do, they're like, "okay, sure you want me to do this thing now? Not a problem. I'll do it." And some teachers, engage – they engage with the change and sometimes that grappling that critical thinking about whether they agree or disagree, or they like, or they don't like, or they think they'll be successful with this change sometimes that looks like resistance

[00:03:59.500] – Steve

So we're off already. I was listening to a podcast on on a walk just a day or two ago and it talked about that the human brain is designed not to want to have to work. In other words, if I can get what I need without having to do that extra work, evolution-wise were designed that way.

[00:04:30.400] – Steve

And I don't know why, but that just jumped into me as I was listening to you because change is actually signaling people up front. That there's some kind of extra work effort energy in front of them, compared to staying with the status quo.

[00:04:51.600] – Becca

Yeah. And I think another way that I put it is our brain is formatted to do what's easiest.

[00:04:59.500] – Becca

We always are looking for the easiest route but we don't realize with the easiest for you is different than what's easiest for me. So some teachers, what's easiest for them is to comply. It's like, okay, you give me a new direction, it's easier for me to comply then cause some kind of kerfuffle, and some folks is easiest for them to resist because there's a harder thing out there for them that they're navigating.

[00:05:29.500] – Steve

So now you're raise another question for me. Is complying a different form of resistance?

[00:05:32.800] – Becca

It could be, it could not be. I'm very weary – I could probably do a whole other podcast just on the different forms of compliance. Some compliance comes from people-pleasing. I just want you to be happy with me. Some compliance comes from kind of giving up, right? Like, and that could be a form of resist.

[00:05:55.200] – Steve

Actually, complying is easier.

[00:05:59.400] – Becca

Yeah, compliance is like, fine – I won't win anyway. It's like a form of resignation, they'll beat me down anyway so fine, I'll just do it. But it could, it depends on where the compliance is coming from on whether it's resistance or not.

[00:06:14.500] – Steve

So I pulled this statement from some of your work that I did that. I'd like to use as our jump off point and your statement is, "resistance isn't refusal. It's a signal of unmet needs."

[00:06:29.600] – Becca

Yes. So underneath all of this is we want to stop making statements about resistance and start asking questions. And so what ends up happening when we're experiencing resistance and us busy coaches and leaders, we're like we just need you to do this, please – it's what's best for students. We can get real, like they should do this, they shouldn't do that. And what we need to be doing instead of making statements about their resistance, we want to start asking questions.

[00:06:59.400] – Becca

And the big question is, what unmet need do they have? Because underneath all of this, all these layers is the one thing that causes resistance is unmet needs and we want to be asking, what are those needs that aren't being met?

[00:07:17.400] – Steve

So talk to us about what some unmet needs might be and how does a person go about diagnosing what the unmet need is?

[00:07:28.700] – Becca

Yeah, that's a really great question. And I've been using the word, "diagnose" a lot in my work the last couple years. Like let's diagnose – and you and I before I jump into this, you and I were talking about this yesterday. So when we think about teaching children reading, I'm going to give an analogy – when we think about, like, Joe needs to read.

[00:07:46.900] – Becca

Okay, well, Joe doesn't know how to read. What we don't do is we don't say just try a reading strategy with him, but we do this with resistance we say so and so is experiencing resistance or we usually say so and so is resistant,

resistant. And then we say, just try resistance strategy.

[00:08:09.400] – Becca

And it's like hold on – we would never do that when teaching a child how to read. We would diagnose what they need help in and give them the strategy or the tool that would help them get better in that way. We need to do exactly the same with resistance. Instead of saying, "they're resistant" and having some kind of like try the resistance strategy, it's like we need to ask, why are they resisting? We're human beings, right? Humans are complex.

[00:08:38.400] – Becca

And so I've created this framework called, "The Catalyst Mindset."

[00:08:41.900] – Steve

I want to stop you before you go into your framework because you used the phrase that I that I jotted down. You said, "is resistant versus experiencing resistance."

[00:08:56.800] – Becca

Yes. Okay, good. I love talking about this. This is very nuanced language, but I think it's really important for us to distinguish us when we say, "This teacher, this person is resistant," or we say, "resistant teachers," when we label people resistant we keep them the very thing that we don't want them to be.

[00:09:08.600] – Becca

Instead, my language swap is, "is this a person experiencing resistance?" Human beings aren't resistant. I'm not resistant, you're not resistant. We experience resistance.

[00:09:33.900] – Steve

We don't want to be resistant.

[00:09:38.100] – Becca

We just aren't. It's the same as emotions. I'm not a happy

person, I'm not a sad person. I experience happiness and I experience sadness and I experience resistance. It's something I move through in different areas of my life. Sometimes I experience resistance with a certain person in my life or certain area like learning guitar is my current their resistance experience. But I'm not a resistant person. I just experience it on and off throughout my life and we all experience resistance.

[00:10:08.200] – Steve

Great. So let's talk about what some of those unmet needs are then.

[00:10:17.900] – Becca

Okay. Yeah, so this framework I've created helps us, look at, okay, folks, in our schools, they're experiencing resistance. Why are they experiencing resistance? What unmet needs to they have? My framework is called, "The Catalyst Mindsets." And so we want to ask ourselves essentially five questions.

[00:10:38.900] – Becca

And it's looking at people's beliefs because there's some underlying belief that is keeping folks experiencing resistance. A mindset is simply a belief and that's one thing – I worked with the psychologists and researchers. I worked with Carol Dweck with Growth Mindset, I did Growth Mindset work with them, so it's very close to the original Growth Mindset work, not the stuff that ends up on TPT.

[00:11:08.600] – Becca

And so I am like, look, mindsets are not a bulletin board. They're not working hard, they're not resilience. They can cause those things, right? So mindsets are simply beliefs. So the five catalysts mindsets – one is growth mindset. I believe I can improve.

[00:11:28.700] – Becca

Another mindset is success mindset. I believe I can be

successful which is self-efficacy we love to talk about efficacy because the John Hattie's effect size research, right? Belonging mindset – I believe I belong here. Value mindset – I believe this has value for me – value purpose, meaning relevance. And ownership mindset. I believe that by taking responsibility, I can make a difference.

[00:11:57.800] – Becca

And what's cool is within this framework, we can actually say, okay, hold on. They're experiencing resistance what's having them be stuck or feel stuck and it could be one or more of those mindsets that's unsupported. And there's also a very specific I use very specific language and I love that you caught that first piece. Another piece of language that I try really hard to stay integrity with is, I don't say they're missing a mindset. None of us are missing, mindsets.

[00:12:27.100] – Becca

Brains – we have neurons, neural pathways – we can have unsupported mindsets.

[00:12:33.900] – Becca

So my question is, which of those mindsets are unsupported?

[00:12:39.700] – Steve

Would you describe a listen-for as a coach that signals – let's go back to using diagnose. I'm guessing it's engaging the teacher in conversation that causes beliefs to emerge. And so am I listening to the beliefs and the beliefs are helping me identify which of those area mindsets may be the – can I say cause of the resistance?

[00:13:08.300] – Becca

Yeah. The cause of resistance or finding the root cause. That's exactly it. And so I love that you said listening for and I think this is one of the most under talked about skills in coaching. We don't just listen, we listen for certain things.

[00:13:38.400] – Becca

One thing I always recommend is listen to people's complaints. There's gold in people's complaints. Often in coaching, we're like, "We're too busy. We gotta get there. There's now time for complaints." And we try to glaze over toxic positivity. "Well, it is what it is." And it's like, hold on, there's gold in someone's complaints. I have given coaches assignments. I'm like, go back to that teacher and just listen to their complaints because you'll hear what's important to them in their complaints. And so, part of that, someone's experiencing resistance.

[00:14:08.300] – Becca

We can listen to their complaints and sometimes hear what their unmet needs are. Sometimes it's a bit of a smoke signal – not smoke signal, sorry – smoke in mirrors. It's like, that's not the thing. There's something underneath it. For example, if I'm listening to someone's complaint and they could, they could be saying something like, "I just don't have time for this. I don't have time to do this. You know, plan this new curriculum." So, it sounds like they have an unmet need around time management.

[00:14:38.400] – Becca

And that may or may not be true. Often, it's actually not. That's one of those smoke and mirrors ones. Usually there's something is like a secondary complaint. There's usually a primary complaint that's underneath that like, hmmm, why don't you have time? Is it a time management skill issue, or is it you don't find this change relevant – value mindset. So it's like, you actually just don't want to spend the time to do it.

[00:15:08.300] – Steve

There's opportunity when I'm working with a school trying to implement the peer coaching and the the teachers response is, you know, they don't have time to be in another person's classroom. And so a question I'll go back with is, "what would happen in a coaching situation that you engaged in that would cause you to say that was worth the time."

[00:15:33.300] – Becca

Yeah, that's exactly it.

[00:15:38.400] – Steve

And that really helps me find out then but certainly values and beliefs come out of that. But almost always, when time is the resistance, it's not the real resistance. I describe it as a socially acceptable resistance.

[00:15:54.600] – Becca

Oh, that's such a great term. It's a socially acceptable – that's exactly it. If I don't have time, because then I can sit back and people get really bought into these kinds of complaints.

[00:16:08.300] – Becca

Like "oh, they're overwhelmed. We need to take things off their plates." Or we go into like scurry mode of, "we don't want them to burn out. Don't give them too much." When in fact, what's underneath all this isn't that there's too much. It's actually that it's – I don't want to say the wrong things but it's like they don't like the things on their plate.

[00:16:27.100] – Steve

Yeah. Or let's go back to would this be the value mindset – that they're not seeing the value personally for themselves.

[00:16:38.300] – Steve

And I don't mean that derogatorily. They may not be seeing the value for their students from what it is you're asking them to asking them to invest it.

[00:16:52.600] – Becca

Yes, that's exactly it. And I'm going to give you actually a peek into one of my frameworks. So each each mindset has its own framework and so for the value mindset, one of the frameworks is, I call it VUIC.

[00:17:08.300] – Becca

VUIC is the four elements that create that gives tasks value. It's called task value – the researchers called task. value. So, there's four things, one of four things, one or more of these four things give all tasks value in our lives. So we can start to say – and one thing we need to be real careful about, I want to say this before I go into VUIC it is our should's. The way we bring resistance into conversations is we think they should or shouldn't think or be a certain way.

[00:17:38.300] – Becca

Or do certain things, right? And usually has to do with us, like I wouldn't do it that way, so they shouldn't do it that way. And so just because I value something and you know, sometimes people can get caught into like they should value that same thing and it's like, hold on. Let's actually step back to what I think they should be doing and actually look at what they actually are valuing, not what I think they should value. So I want to say that.

[00:18:08.200] – Becca

The four elements, VUIC, is values aligned, which is something could have value for me if it aligns with my identity. This is who I am. So I do things because it aligns with who I am. The the U is usefulness and this is probably the most common one. Does this thing, does this task, is it useful to me in some way including solving a problem? If I implement this reading program, will it help me with behavior management.

[00:18:38.300] – Becca

They're certainly not the same thing, but if I have a problem with behavior management and that's my main focus, will this other thing you asked me to do help me solve that? I is interesting and this is pure interest. This is, I think this is enjoyable and fun.

[00:18:59.400] – Becca

That could give a task value, right? And then part of task value, when we're weighing whether something is valuable for,

us is also, the C is cost. We're weighing, what does this cost me? And so for me, like playing guitars a great example, for me, I think it is interesting and fun. And yet the cost is time. I have a time cost issue. I'm like, well, if I play guitar, then I won't be able to do this other thing. And so I'm weighing time cost.

[00:19:29.600] – Steve

It's triggering a strategy that I've tried to lay it out as a picture for coaches to have in their mind when they're working through that. But I talked about a balance scale and if you have benefits on one side and cost on the other side, if you're asking the person to make a change, you've got to get the balance scale to tip.

[00:19:58.700] – Steve

So the payoff side, has to outweigh the cost side. If you look at it science-wise, you've got two options there. One is you can increase what the payoffs are. So you've got a nice list of payoffs there, or decrease the cost, or both.

[00:20:17.800] – Becca

That's exactly it. And learning what a payoff and a cost for that person is

[00:20:23.600] – Steve

Bingo.

[00:20:24.600] – Becca

And it's some people are fueled by praise. Some people like you praise me, I'll do whatever you want.

[00:20:28.600] – Becca

I am not fueled by praise, so that wouldn't really motivate me a lot, but there's a lot of people that are. So figuring out what is a payoff for that other person? And I think one of the biggest things that keeps us from understanding other people is our shoulds. It's because we project on other people and I am repeating myself because I see this so often in schools

that we get caught up in our own heads as leaders and start to imagine that the person in front of us thinks the same way we do.

[00:21:04.900] – Steve

Trying to put a couple pieces that are coming at me here. I am big on questioning and listening for coaching. So that the, you know, the critical skill sets for coaches – questioning and listening and having the listening drive your questions.

[00:21:33.600] – Steve

I think I'm realizing, as I'm listening to you, that a critical part of that is teacher beliefs and values, which they, now might broaden my definition of, to your list of mindsets.

[00:21:59.000] – Steve

But if I'm if I'm going to be effective as a coach and getting the teacher to reflect on, whatever change it is we're doing, the more I know about the teacher's thinking in each of those mindsets, the better. It's really giving coaches a great set of listen-for's is what i'm hearing.

[00:22:22.900] – Becca

Oh my gosh. Yes, you're the first person to put this together. Thank you.

[00:22:28.500] – Becca

Exactly. And I use it all the time and I'll ask myself these questions. I listen for even myself. "Why am I resisting that?" I've had coaches, learn this framework and they're like, "my relationship with my teenager got better" because they're listening for what is an unsupported mindset here? That's exactly it. Because it can be overwhelming to say, okay, why are they doing this? What's the root cause of this, right? Or even just like, what's important to them?

[00:22:58.400] – Becca

But if I can listen to her five basic things, I have somewhere

to start.

[00:23:03.500] – Steve

Yeah. So what do coaching leaders need to believe about themselves in order to support the mindsets of their clients?

[00:23:17.500] – Becca

Leaders need to, first, I think the fundamental belief that I have a lot of analogies with resistance but one, that resistance is a compass and not a dead end. I think, one, we need to view resistance as that and two, as leaders that we can have the tools to figure out what is causing the resistance and to believe that we can help them make a total turnaround. Like this can we can actually have a breakthrough.

[00:23:48.900] – Becca

And I think there's a belief in there that it's going beyond what we have previously seen happen in schools if that makes sense. Sometimes within our schools, we have these contexts. So I'm going to I'm going to go real broad right now. We have the way we do school has certain contexts, I actually call them – ooh, I never share about these on podcasts. I call him the silent progress killers and there's kind of a nickname – the Kryptonite, there's a kryptonite on the way that we do school, that actually actively works against each of these mindsets.

[00:24:18.700] – Becca

So for ownership, mindset ownership mindsets' silent progress killer in schools is our compliance culture. The way we do school, the superintendent buys a curriculum and then tells everyone to do it and then holds everyone accountable and we can look at the usage rates, right? That is compliance culture.

[00:24:45.100] – Becca

And yet, we are trying to develop teacher ownership.

[00:24:49.900] – Becca

And so I think one belief – this is, I know, I’m zooming out real big, but there we need to understand and start looking at sometimes, the way we have assumed that we have to do school actively works against us developing these and supporting these mindsets in our teachers. So one, a really a willingness to zoom out and say, huh, how am I supporting and inadvertently accidentally on supporting these mindsets?

[00:25:20.700] – Steve

Your mindsets should – here comes a should – it’s the core of what a teacher wants to make happen with his or her learner’s.

[00:25:34.900] – Steve

Yes, that’s exactly it. They can go – every human where it might growth mindset has gone, catalyst mindsets can go. That’s exactly it.

[00:25:41.900] – Steve

Because with the time pressure curriculum on teachers, the tendency is to run over resistance. You know nothing that to see resistance from kids as they’re not seeing the value or they’re not believing they can succeed and that that’s what I need to be addressing.

[00:26:09.000] – Becca

We try to compliance our way out of resistance. And that is absolutely not – it is trying to put – I like to say it’s like putting icing on a mud pie. We’re like trying to like, you know, just force it to happen and it this is where we see repeat behaviors for students. “Why do they keep doing that every week?” Teachers, “why do they keep her returning back to their old ways?” Because we’re trying to compliance our way out of resistance.

[00:26:37.900] – Becca

It is rare – and I’ve been doing this work for many, many years, over eight years – when I’m in schools, it is rare that pure accountability is actually the thing that’s needed. Rare,

rare, rare. I could say, maybe a handful of times in all of the years and the thousands of people I've worked with across the US, that it's pure, accountability that needed to happen.

[00:27:06.700] – Becca

Usually, it's one of those five mindsets.

[00:27:09.800] – Steve

So one last thought from me that's running in my head and then I'll open the floor for anything you think we've missed that you want to lay out here, but I'm thinking that a common coaching problem, is the coach responding with resistance to resistance.

[00:27:27.800] – Becca

That's exactly it. Yes, thank you. That's exactly right. So us as coaches and leaders, we enter a conversation and we can also bring resistance, right? And usually, and I'm going to bring this up one more time, it's in the form of shoulds and I like to say we're shoulding everywhere and making a mess. It's a shouldy stinky mess and I should on other people – you should or shouldn't be doing that and I should on myself – I should or shouldn't be doing that but I can look like perfectionism sometimes.

[00:27:57.000] – Becca

And we want to be careful that when we are entering into coaching conversations and relationships that we self check and we make sure that we're not bringing the resistance because, what we resist, persists.

[00:28:14.900] – Steve

So if I'm if I'm hearing resistance from a teacher and it raises my resistance, it's gonna bring persistence in the teachers.

[00:28:29.200] – Becca

That's exactly it. And my recommendation for folks who are like, "oh no. I think I do that. I think I should on them when

they're doing things that I don't think they should be doing that."

[00:28:44.800] – Becca

The Nuance of that – of the should's – I have my expectation continuum, which I share in The Resistance Remedy is, we want to shift from should's, which is having an expectation and there's a value judgment there. I think it's good or bad that you're doing that. We want to shift to support. So that's the same expectation. But now I'm bringing curiosity. How could I support them in meeting that expectation? And that's where we can ask those five mindsets. What do they support in?

[00:29:16.700] – Steve

So open floor – anything about this topic that you didn't get a chance to put out there at our conversation so far that you want to use as a wrap up?

[00:29:28.500] – Becca

I think one thing I just want to hammer home around listening – listening is one of the most powerful tools to diagnose why resistance is happening. And the quality of listening is super important because we can be bad listeners, right? Just because I'm quiet does not mean I'm a good listener at all.

[00:29:46.100] – Becca

And neurologically, people can sense whether I'm actually actually listening. And it tends to be a subconscious thing, right? So one, when I'm listening, I make sure that I have put aside my should's and two, when I am listening for what I – to try to help them peel back the layers, I use a lot of reflective listening and I'm sure a lot of folks listening to this podcast probably know some of, you know, saying what I heard you say was, sounds like you're feeling.

[00:30:16.000] – Becca

It seems like, you know, it's happening this way for you. Right? Repeating back. Not parroting, right? But repeating

back what someone is saying helps them peel back the layers, to get to the root cause so we can get beyond, “I just don’t have time for this,” right? And so I really want to recommend as folks are listening, to reflectively listen to help to get down because the most powerful pieces, when we get down to that root cause – how if, I mean, I’ve had teachers go from, “I’m not doing anything you’re saying” to showing up to my office to other coaches offices saying, “what should I do next.”

[00:30:50.000] – Becca

And it can happen within 24 hours when we actually address the actual root cause.

[00:31:08.900] – Steve

Well, thank you so much. I was looking forward to this. I knew it would be great and it’s been that way. What’s the best way for listeners to follow up with you with questions or check out the resources that you have available?

[00:31:24.600] – Becca

Yeah, so my website is thewholeeducator.com and if you want to check out “The Resistance Remedy,” its \$370, which tends to be like, you don’t need approval from a principal.

[00:31:37.700] – Becca

If you want a cheap resource that explains all of the nuances around all of these mindsets, it is there in my website. You can listen to my podcast, “Coaching The Whole Educator” and if you want to just email me, feel free to do that. Becca@thewholeeducator.com. So if we put the link to your to your website, into the podcast, lead-in – easy for folks to find you and follow up.

[00:32:07.520] – Becca

For sure.

[00:32:07.700] – Steve

Okay. Well, thank you so much.

[00:32:10.200] – Becca

Yeah, thank you for having me.

[00:32:13.600] – Steve [Outro]

Thanks for listening, folks. I'd love to hear what you're pondering. You can find me on Twitter or LinkedIn at Steve Barkley or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.

Coaching for Teacher Happiness

I recently read Jonathan Haidt's, "[The Happiness Hypothesis](#)" and pondered several times how elements from his work apply to coaching teachers. When might increased teacher happiness lead to increased student learning? What role can coaching play in that connection? Haidt presents a metaphor that can be helpful in a coaching approach: the elephant and the rider. Working together, the rider represents our rational, planning, problem-solving self that sets goals, analyzes progress, and decides what we should do next. The elephant symbolizes our emotional, intuitive self with the instinctive reactions that show up when a lesson flops, a student refuses to engage, or a new initiative feels overwhelming.



When stress surfaces in teaching, it's often the elephant reacting first:

- "I must not be good at this."
- "This will never work."
- "I can't handle one more change."

Meanwhile, the rider tries to reason through the moment:

- "Is there evidence that students are improving?"
- "I can adjust the approach tomorrow."
- "Other teachers have made this shift successfully."

Instructional coaching often focuses on the rider: strategies, data, and classroom practices. But coaching is also about helping teachers with the elephant: the emotional terrain of teaching. The elephant is stronger. If emotion and logic pull in different directions, emotion usually wins. In schools, that "threat" often comes from vulnerability: trying new practices, taking risks in front of students, or opening classroom doors for coaching and collaboration.

Coaches help riders and elephants move together, acknowledging stress while reframing it as a sign of growth, not failure. When teachers see the discomfort of modifying practice as evidence that learning is happening for them, the emotional load can shift. Progress becomes empowering rather than exhausting. Supporting teachers to reinterpret stress is essential to building the confidence and joy that keep great teachers thriving.



Haidt offers this formula for Happiness: **Happiness = Set Point + Conditions + Voluntary Activities (H=S+C+V)**

Set Point (S)- We each have a natural “baseline” level of happiness influenced by genetics and temperament. Teachers bring this baseline with them into their professional lives. Coaches can’t change someone’s wiring—but they can help teachers regulate emotional responses and build confidence that nudges that baseline upward over time. Consider how coaching conversations create opportunities for coachees to reflect on initial interpretations of events. A common

coaching moment occurs when a teacher expresses concern that none of the students are engaging in the learning plan she is implementing. As the coaching conversation continues, her description identifies areas of success with some students, and the problem involves a smaller number of students that a plan can be built to address.

“Events in the world affect us only through our interpretations of them, so if we control our interpretations, we can control our world.”

(Haidt)

Conditions (C)- Conditions are environmental and organizational factors that can influence daily experiences such as workload, expectations, collegial relationships, and support from leadership. These are areas where coaching and school leadership can have direct impact. Improving conditions reduces stress and isolation, both key drivers of burnout. From the earliest days of my work with coaching, including peer coaching, I have described the valuable impact of teachers receiving feedback/recognition for their commitment to students as well as celebrating student learning success. Coaches can influence conditions not only through individual conversations, but by helping teams normalize risk-taking, reflection, and recognition of effort as well as outcomes.

Voluntary Activities (V)- These are the chosen actions people engage in that create purpose and joy:

- Trying a new instructional strategy
- Collaborating with a colleague
- Reflecting on student progress
- Setting personal learning goals

Pleasure comes more from making progress toward goals than from achieving them.

(Haidt)

Coaches fuel happiness when they support teachers in selecting and pursuing meaningful professional growth that connects to evidence of student success. When teachers choose their focus, effort feels purposeful rather than imposed. This contributes to both happiness and persistence. Agency transforms effort from compliance into commitment.

Coaching for happiness does not mean avoiding challenges or protecting teachers from discomfort. It means helping teachers interpret challenge as meaningful, discomfort as temporary, and progress as real. When coaches attend to conditions and support teachers' voluntary efforts toward growth, happiness becomes less about feeling good and more about feeling capable, supported, and hopeful. In that space, teachers persist and students benefit from educators who believe their work is making a difference.

Haidt's formula reinforces a powerful idea: teacher happiness grows where support, autonomy, and progress intersect. When coaches shape healthier conditions and engage teachers in learning that visibly impacts student success, happiness becomes part of the culture rather than an individual pursuit.

Educators' Learner Mindset

Here is a slide that I frequently display at the start of facilitating a learning opportunity for school leaders, instructional coaches, and teachers. I personalize the statement with a look at myself. "There is no mountaintop in learning mastery as an educator. One needs not worry about reaching mastery prior to retirement. Having passed the "retirement opportunity age," I have too much to learn to

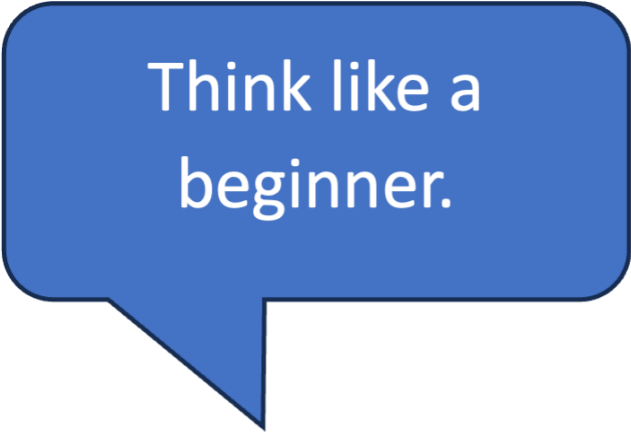
retire.



Michael Nelson & Peter DeWitt in an Education Week Opinion Piece, "[Calling Yourself a 'Lead Learner' Doesn't Make It So : The illusion of mastery can have unintended consequences](#)," provided additional insights for my continued learning. They pointed out that the term "lead learner," often used by school leaders in describing their role might suggest that the leader learns something and then teaches others. That might miss the image of leaders learning from those they are leading.

That thought connects with a suggestion I've provided when asked, "What should we look for in interviewing candidates for instructional coaching roles?" My response is that one thing to look for is excitement about what they will be able to learn as they engage with teachers in coaching conversations. [Jim Knight's partnership approach](#) to coaching provides a foundation for seeing instructional coaches and teachers as co-learners engaged in a shared inquiry process. Rather than positioning the coach as the expert who delivers answers, the partnership model emphasizes equality, choice, dialogue, reflection, and reciprocity. In this stance, coaches enter classrooms with curiosity, seeking to understand a teacher's

goals, beliefs, and context, and then collaborating to explore strategies that might support the desired student outcomes. Both coach and teacher contribute knowledge, co-constructing ideas, trying them, gathering evidence, and refining practice together.



Think like a
beginner.

Nelson and Witt introduced me to the Japanese term Shoshin, often translated as “beginner’s mind.” It is a concept in Zen Buddhism that describes approaching any task, relationship, or problem with the openness, curiosity, and humility of a true beginner, even when one is experienced. Expertise is not abandoned, but it is held lightly. The goal is to see situations freshly, without assumptions, preconceptions, or the defensiveness that can come with expertise. The beginner’s mindset expands learning because it keeps us receptive to new insights and willing to explore rather than protect what we already know.

“In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities; in the expert’s mind there are few.”

(Zen Teacher, Shunryu Suzuki)

These elements of Shoshin create an environment for a learner’s mindset.

- Openness: A willingness to consider unfamiliar ideas and

perspectives.

- Curiosity: A stance of wondering, questioning, and exploring rather than judging.
- Humility: An understanding that no matter how much we know, we are always learners.
- Presence: Attending fully to the moment, which allows for deeper noticing and insight.
- Non-attachment: Letting go of fixed outcomes or proving oneself “right.”

As I look at this list, I think about how often coaches talk about the enjoyment they find working with beginning teachers who are often so “open” to engaging with the coach. As coaches, we need to model those same beginner behaviors which have us enter conversations without assumptions as to what the teacher should do, asking authentic rather than leading questions. By modelling intellectual humility and continuous learning, coaches create psychological safety, so teachers are more willing to experiment.

“There’s comfort in being good at your job. It builds trust, credibility, and often, influence. But comfort can dull our curiosity and limit our growth.”

(Nelson and Witt)

A Shoshin approach can also play a powerful role in the work of Professional Learning Communities. That mindset helps teams stay open, curious, and growth oriented as they examine student learning and shape instructional approaches. In a PLC operating with a beginner’s mind, members approach data, student work, and each other’s perspectives without defensiveness or preconceived explanations. Instead of assuming they already know why students performed a certain way or which strategy will work best, they enter conversations

with **curiosity**: *What might we be missing? What else could be true? What new possibilities haven't we explored?* That mindset encourages deeper listening, more authentic collaboration, and a willingness to test ideas through collective inquiry rather than relying on past practice. Shoshin reduces ego and expertise-protection that can hinder a team's learning. Instead, PLC members model humility and openness by wondering aloud, experimenting, and learning from colleagues. Shoshin can support PLCs being dynamic learning communities where continuous discovery drives better outcomes for students.

Observing Classrooms as a Curious Learner

Matt Renwick recently posted a blog on MiddleWeb titled, "[Observing Instruction with a Curiosity Mindset](#)." Matt is the author of **Lead Like a C.O.A.C.H.** and has [previously joined me on a podcast](#). He identifies these keys to leading like a coach:

Create confidence through trust.

Organize around a priority.

Affirm promising practices.

Communicate feedback.

Help teachers become leaders.



In our podcast, Matt shared: *"You can't just put out some kind of a goal and offer some professional development and monitor progress and then expect outcomes. School change and improvement is not linear in that sense as we might put it on paper. I realized as a principal, I couldn't do this job without the teacher's input and understanding their decision making. I needed to stop observing and judging. Not that there's not a place for that as a part of being a supervisor, but it really has become a fraction of how I spend my days now. I'm now coming in daily, just learning, just coming in with kind of getting rid of my biases as much as I can and trying not to make assumptions and just coming in and noticing what's going on, trying to notice what's going well, communicating that with the teachers and eventually leading into conversations around their instruction, which is where the impact happens, it's learning together."*

"The question isn't whether we should

observe instruction. It's whether we can observe it with curiosity rather than judgment – as learners alongside our teachers rather than as evaluators standing apart from them.”

(Matt Renwick)

Renwick points out the following from Halverson and Kelley in [“Mapping Leadership: The Tasks that Matter for Improving Teaching and Learning in Schools:”](#)

“If leaders can take the stance as a learner in the classroom, they can observe how the lesson unfolds to students. This stance requires leaders to refrain from judgment about the quality of the lesson in order to notice questions raised by teacher and student interactions.”

Renwick suggests two key focus points for leaders in observing classrooms and providing feedback.

- Refraining from judgement
- Sharing observations from the students perspective

I agree with Renwick's term “curiosity mindset.” I have suggested to new coaches that if they allow their curiosity to emerge as they pre-conference with a teacher, it will guide their questioning and listening. My curiosity emerges when I ask the teacher to describe “What are the most important things student need to do during the learning activity that will impact the learning outcomes? (student learning production behaviors) and “What are you seeing as your important actions that will generate those student behaviors?” Those discussions provide me with insights into the teachers mindset about teaching and learning.

I can now observe students during the learning activity and

the degree to which they engage in the desired behaviors. I can also consider how the teacher's actions impacted that student engagement. As I enter a post conference I can listen with curiosity to the teacher's observations and insights. My specific data observations about what I saw and heard from students add to the teacher's reflection. If my curiosity engages the teacher's curiosity– we are both positioned for learning.

When our curiosity is triggered, we think more deeply and rationally about decisions and come up with more-creative solutions. In addition, curiosity allows leaders to gain more respect from their followers and inspires employees to develop more-trusting and more-collaborative relationships with colleagues.

([Harvard Business Review](#))

I recently listened to a [podcast that Jim Knight recorded with John Campbell and Chris Munro](#) around their book, “**Growth Talk : A Coaching Way of Thinking.**” As they discussed key elements of ‘growth coaching’ as having the coachee think deeper, identify purpose, and monitor progress I reflected on how my curiosity mindset drives those discussions. They labeled key coaching skills such as questioning, listening, paraphrasing, summarizing, and noticing. As I listened to their conversation, I was reinforced that curiosity – a desired to understand and learn – provides a focus for coaching skills. I am now curious about my work with coaches who are learning coaching skills. I am wondering if exploring a curiosity mindset deeper would strengthen their learning and application

of coaching skills.

By choosing curiosity, we build trust, honor teachers' professionalism, open possibilities for student voice and agency, and create a coaching culture of collective learning.

Super Facilitation: Maximizing PLC Benefits

"Super-facilitators are people with a talent for bringing individual group members together, combining each one's unique strengths to promote optimal team performance. They integrate diverse expertise, promote equitable contributions, and cultivate trust among teammates, generating collective intelligence—a group's ability to solve problems together."

That's the description Jamil Zaki provides in a HBR article titled, "[*Every Team Needs a Super Facilitator*](#)." Zaki's adds an important point, *"We can become them (super facilitators) ourselves. With the right mindset and a few key practices, anyone can turn talent into trust, and groups into something greater than the sum of their parts."*

He suggests three super facilitator powers to build:

- Attunement to Emotions – Because empathy is socially magnetic, connecting with others' emotions provides a sharper grasp of the team's makeup and encourages maximizing members contributions.
- Communication – Super facilitators communicate their beliefs in their colleagues and highlight each teammates potential, encouraging the same practice among members.
- Distribution – During collaboration super facilitators

distribute time and attention so that everyone contributes and no one dominates.

Elizabeth Dity provides some insights for facilitators to consider for the opening, middle, and end of sessions.

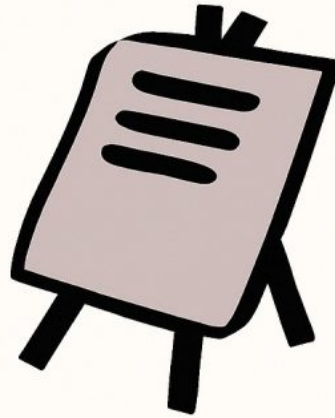
Opening – Most of us need to warm up to get into a creative spirit. Neuroscience tells us that to do this well, people must feel welcome and connect with one another. As a rule, the sooner people speak, the more engaged they will be throughout the meeting. In a smaller group, provide an opening question for everyone to respond to. (When did a student put a smile on your face this past week?) If your group is larger form pairs or triads? Key is that everyone talks. Next, it's the facilitator's job to bring the purpose to life, to activate people's interest in the challenge or task at hand. This is a reason that I am big on PLC's having minutes and agendas. Notes from our last session and an agenda for this one. If our last meeting ended by setting an agenda for this PLC, we should be ready to move forward and make progress.

Agenda

An **Agenda** is key to short meetings that are effective in getting to action.....

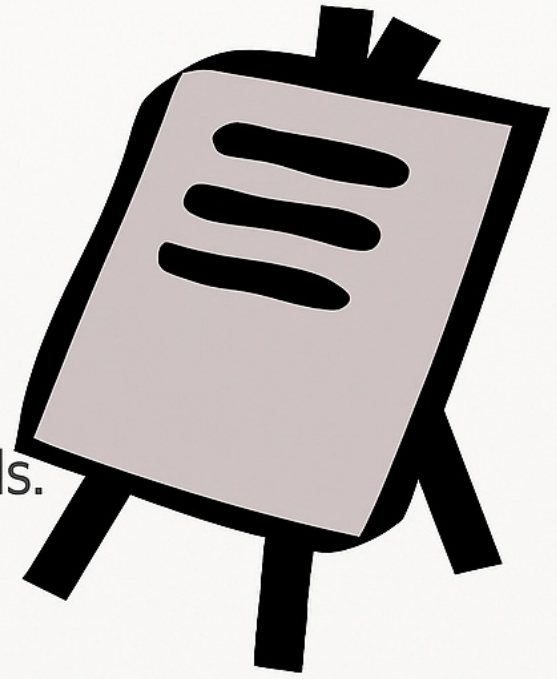
Meetings end with setting **Agenda** for next meeting

Most meetings end with homework (tasks) to be done for next meeting and commitment to each other.



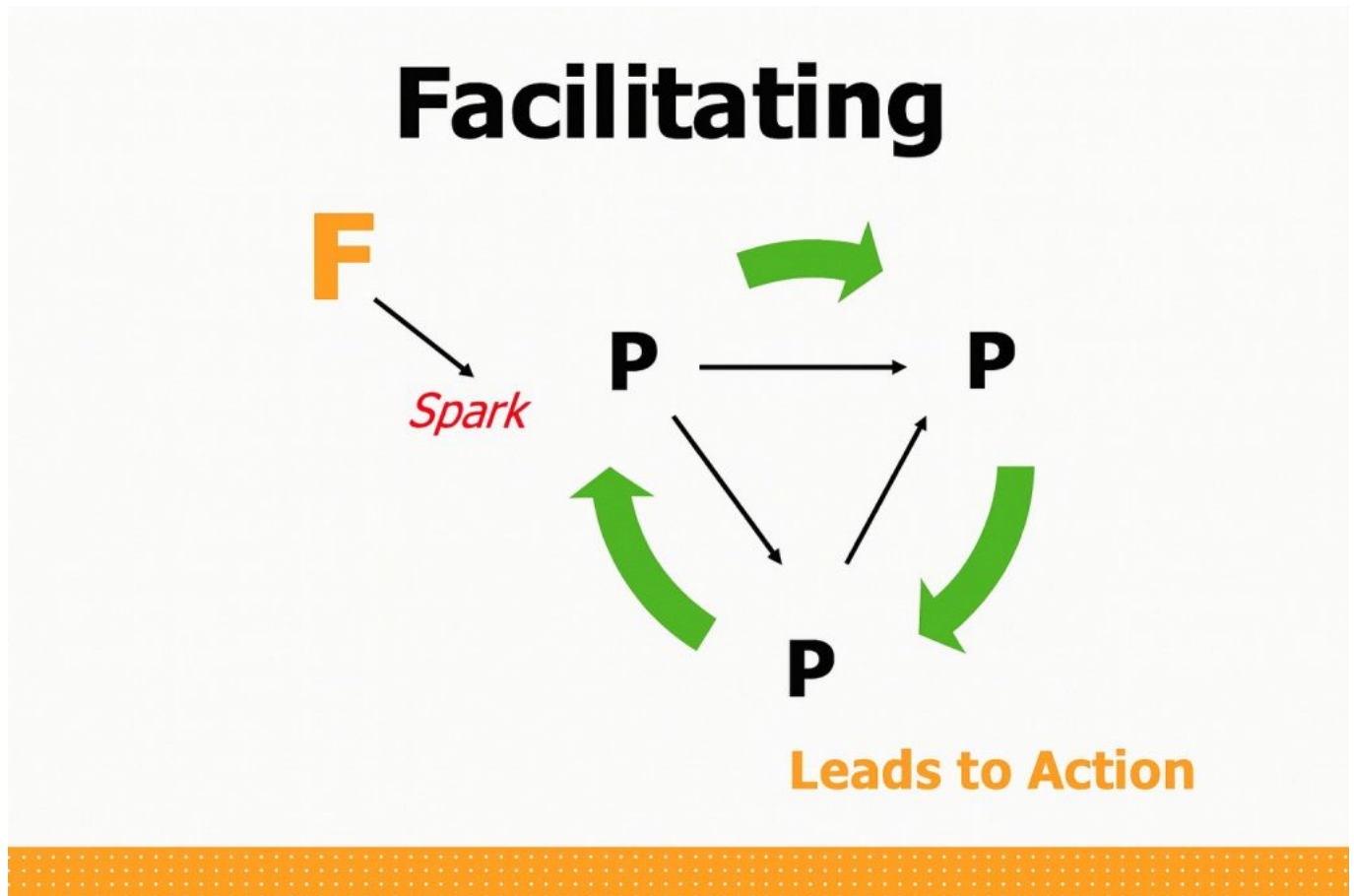
PLC Minutes

- Help keep us focused and maximize our time by avoiding backtracking.
- Support an absent participant.
- Need not be detailed records. Bullet points around key items explored or ideas identified for future actions.
- End the minutes with the agenda for the next meeting and post to an agreed upon site for your PLC.



Middle – Choose a “prompt” to focus the discussion. Usually framed as a question, a strong prompt is specific enough that people can respond without too much effort, and broad enough to invite diverse views and new thinking. The ideal stimulus meets three criteria: it gets people oriented or reoriented to the task and relevant context; it adds something new to their thinking; and, if possible, it sparks some emotion. The more vivid and concrete, the better.

I describe this element as the facilitator providing a spark. The spark, most often students' work or concern, leads to conversation among the participants with the facilitator recognizing when the time is right to move to the next step or action. Taking action is key to PLC colleagues finding value in PLC time.



“PLC time is supposed to be sacred; a space for educators to collaborate, reflect, and, most importantly, move the needle for students. But somewhere along the way, many teams lost steam. Meetings became routine. Goals got fuzzy. And what was once a promising structure started to

feel like...just another meeting."

([Otus.com](https://www.otus.com))

Ending – Tight timelines, such as the start of the next class period, can lead to rushed endings that at times leave members feeling stressed with what was left “in the air” or sensing that their time was just wasted. [Doty provides suggestions](#) for facilitators concerning meeting endings:

- Cue the close– A usual meeting process is open-narrow-close. Cuing the members to be narrowing can increase the likelihood of ending with action. I’ve suggested for most PLCs that 20 minutes of discussion should lead to action. That action may not be that we have a plan to implement. It could be that we have raised questions that need to be explored so that we start the next meeting with information that leads us forward. Discussing a struggling student, members might ask about information from last year’s teacher, specialist teachers’ experiences, or the student’s interests outside school. The team can make commitments for different members to gather pieces of information prior to the next PLC meeting.
- Call for the decision– Agreement on how a decision will be reached should be part of the PLC norms and/or decided upon before the group begins exploring options on a particular decision. Is the group under a fixed deadline for a decision to be reached in this meeting or is there time to leave the meeting to explore further and decide at the next meeting? Is the decision a critical one and time is available for coming to a consensus or is a majority view decision agreeable to members. Commitment to the decision is needed in either case.
- Outline next steps and open questions– If a decision was reached and action is to begin, it is critical that next

steps with a suggested timeline are stated. If the decision was delayed, what are the questions that still need to be explored? What research does the group desire to gather? I am a big fan of minutes being taken at PLC meetings and forwarded to members along with the agenda for the next meeting. Most PLC sessions end with homework to be completed prior to the next session. Nothing is worse than starting the next meeting with different expectations of what was agreed to be done or data to be collected and brought to the meeting. Minutes encourage the commitment of team members. I also believe that reading minutes assists administrators in assessing how PLC time is being invested. Some schools share minutes with everyone or with all PLC facilitators to encourage teaming across PLCs, using each other as resources.

Having quality PLC time requires each member to take some responsibility for the group's effectiveness. All members learning facilitation skills, (which also apply in the classroom) advances greater learning and success. School leaders should provide opportunities for training and coaching feedback in facilitation skills. As members fulfill PLC commitments, trust builds among the team. Increased trust leads to members being more vulnerable which increases risk-taking and increases member learning, leading to increased student success. A strong upward spiral!