Exploring and Coaching Teacher Credibility

"If a teacher is not perceived as credible, the students just turn off."
– John Hattie

The Visible Learning website identifies four key factors of credibility: **trust, competence, dynamism and immediacy**. Let's explore each one.

Trust

Shaun Killian (Teacher Credibility: Why It Matters & How To Build It) shares that teachers need to communicate caring for their students, both as learners and as people. Learners have trust when they believe that the teacher has an expectation and vested interest in their learning success. Learners know the teacher is always there, providing needed support. Trust is built when students believe they are known and liked by their teacher. Killian recommends, "*Go out of your way to talk to them about their lives and their interests outside of class. Share their excitement, empathize with their sadness/fears, and be mentally present with them when you do.*"

Competence

The Wing Institute, which focuses on evidence-based teaching, identifies teachers' critical teaching competencies as:

- Instructional delivery
- Classroom management
- Formative assessment
- Personal competencies (soft skills)

Killian suggests that students describe competence as, "knows her stuff, is good at helping me learn it, and can manage student classroom behaviors."

Dynamism

Here is a description of dynamism found at WH Magazine:

"Teacher dynamism can motivate students by an excellent repertoire coupled by an aura of self-confidence. A dynamic teacher has the ability to bring out the best in students by way of his voice, body language, tone and entertaining presentations. Teacher enthusiasm can rub on even the passive students and kindle a positive attitude towards learning."

“Students regard teachers who love their work and who relished the challenge of teaching as being more credible than other teachers.”

– Shaun Killian

Immediacy

Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey, writing in Boosting Your Teacher Credibility, describe immediacy as accessibility and relatability as perceived by students. They share a video of a teacher who makes herself accessible yet has an urgency that signals students that their learning is important.

“Teach with urgency” so students sense that their work matters and you’re not wasting their time. Start the class on time and use every minute wisely. Provide tasks students can complete while you engage in routine tasks like taking attendance and have “sponge activities” ready for when lessons run short. (But note that “teaching with urgency” doesn’t mean making the class stressful.)

- Wow! What a complex and common-sense way of looking at

teacher impact on student learning. I have recently heard several comments from coaches asking, “What do I say when a teacher tells me, she just doesn’t know what to ask a coach to observe?” My common response is that the teacher need not have anything in mind at the start of a pre-conference. If you’ll spend 10 minutes talking about an upcoming student learning experience, an observable item of learner or teacher behavior (or some of each) will emerge.

I now have another possible response.”Teacher credibility has a strong effect size on student learning. Are any of the elements of credibility of interest to you?”

Here are some questions I might use to begin a conversation.

- Credibility lies in students’ perception. Which of the four areas are you most comfortable believing that your students’ perception of you is high or strong? Why?
- What teacher behaviors or actions on your part impact those student perceptions? Which behaviors do you consciously implement? Which ones are natural or internalized?
- Which of the four areas are you less certain of students’ perceptions? What do you see/hear from students that raise a question for you? What would you observe that would suggest you positively impacted student perception?
- Are there elements of the curriculum or groups of students where you find establishing credibility to be more challenging? How does that challenge impact your conscious behaviors/actions?
- There are many ways that teachers communicate passion. How is your passion communicated?
- How do you balance urgency with acceptable student stress level?

As a teacher responds with inquiry to any one of these questions, a more focused conversation could emerge, highlighting teacher and/or student behaviors for the coach to observe. Those observations, explored in a post conference, could lead to additional focused observations or experimentation with teacher behaviors to increase credibility.