Why Do We Need a Culture of Coaching in Our Schools?

In many of my presentations I discuss two beliefs behind my work in schools:

Teaching is a team sport and **Teaching needs to be a public act**. Both of these beliefs reinforce the need for schools to have a culture of coaching that defines staff relationships.

This week I was in Rochester, NY providing a combined coaching skills training for mentors and instructional coaches. I charged both roles with building the coaching culture of their schools. Mentors have a wonderful opportunity to introduce new teachers to a profession where the constant reflection on teaching and learning with peers is an expectation. Instructional coaches who request constant coaching from the teachers they work with model the same culture.

Research* on the complexity of teacher decision making dramatically illustrates why as teachers we would want to be seeking frequent observation and feedback on teaching and learning in our classrooms. Teachers need to deal with:

Multidimensionality– Teachers' choices are not simple. Many different tasks and events are occurring simultaneously. Waiting for one student to answer a question may negatively affect the motivation of another student.

Simultaneity– Many things happen at once and the teacher's focus is tugged. What wasn't observed by the teacher but seen by the coach can be very insightful.

Immediacy– Because the pace of the classroom is rapid there is little time for reflection during teaching. Teaching decisions are made quickly. Reflective conversations following a coach's observation can increase the effectiveness of future teacher

choices.

Unpredictability– Classroom events often take unanticipated turns, and distractions are frequent. Comparing “what was planned “with “what happened” is a great post conference reflection producing future teacher learning.

A report titled, **Teaching**, issued the by UNESCO and the International Bureau of Education summarized key points from research on effective teaching. As you read through the list you can easily envision the many ways a coach could enhance a teacher’s observation of learning, reflection about “what is happening” and the creation of additional options to increase learning for each student.

Students learn best within cohesive and caring learning communities.

Students learn more when most of the available time is allocated to curriculum related activities and the classroom management system emphasizes maintaining their engagement in those activities.

Components of the curriculum are aligned to create a cohesive program for accomplishing instructional purposes and goals. Teachers can prepare students for learning by providing an initial structure to clarify intended outcomes and cue desired learning strategies.

To facilitate meaningful learning and retention, content is explained clearly and developed with emphasis on its structure and connections.

Questions are planned to engage students in sustained discourse structured around powerful ideas.

Students need sufficient opportunities to practice and apply what they are learning, and to receive improvement-oriented feedback

The teacher provides whatever assistance students need to enable them to engage in learning activities productively.

The teacher models and instructs students in learning and self-regulation strategies.

Students often benefit from working in pairs or small groups to construct understandings or help one another master skills.

The teacher uses a variety of formal and informal assessment methods to monitor progress towards learning goals.

The teacher establishes and follows through on appropriate expectations for learning outcomes.

When you meet a teacher who struggles with, “I don’t know what I’d want to examine through coaching”, consider offering this blog to spur questions worth exploring.

*James McMillan in Classroom Assessment; Principles and practice for Effective Standards-based Instruction ..Pearson (2011) citing W.Doyle Handbook of Research on Teaching (1986)