# Learning Companions

Learning Companion is the phrase my Turkish colleague, Kayhan Karli, uses to describe peer coaching. Kayhan is the Director General of ÖĞRETMEN AKADEMİSİ VAKFI, a foundation that has now provided training to over 70,000 Turkish teachers who historically had received very limited professional development. Kayhan shared that he uses the metaphor of ” Life is a learning journey and you always need trusted, equal learning companions for this life long journey.” So teachers bring their companions into their classrooms.

YOLDAS is the Turkish term for **Companion**. Kayhan created a mnemonic with a word for each letter from YOLDAS that captures critical points for coaches (companions) to remember as they apply the training that he has provided.

**Y stands for contracting for the journey**

**O  stands for positive phrasing always**

**L  stands for active listening**

**D  stands for  inquire deeply with powerful questions**

**A  stands for action plan for the journey**

**S  stands for  summarize and check for related environments**

Here are some of my thoughts regarding Kayhan's key components…..

Contracting– I have often described the pre-conference as agreeing to a contract. The coach and teacher agree upon the focus of the observation, the data that would be gathered, the role that the coach should play in the observation and post conference. Trust is built when the coach honors the contract.

**Positive Phrasing Always**– positive phrasing sets the environment that encourages the teacher's willingness to be vulnerable and hence gain the most from coaching. I often illustrate that athletic coaches are trained to use positive phrasing in tense situations. An effective football coach will say "hold the ball tightly rather than don't fumble." Instructional coaches focus teachers on the student behaviors they DO want and how the teacher might adjust or change to get the desired behavior.

**Active Listening**– While questioning is a critical verbal sill for coaches, it is listening that identifies the "question" that should be asked. After trainees observe a conference that I model, they often ask for the list of questions to use or they noted my questions and then find they aren't effective in their practice conference. The questions emerge from the conversation. Allowing oneself to really listen and not be planning the next question is a key understanding.

**Inquire Deeply with Powerful Questions**– In Joellen Killion's writing on Heavy Coaching, she illustrates that questions cause teachers to examine their beliefs and practice. When teacher practice or student results are incongruent with a teacher's beliefs, disequilibrium sets the stage for change and growth. Now the coach can be a partner (companion) in supporting the teacher's desired change in practice. I get my greatest reinforcement when a teacher pauses during a conference and says to me," That's a really good question."

**Action Plan for the Journey**– In the post conference the opportunity exist for the teacher to think through next steps. A coach's questions can guide this exploration. Sometimes this means another observation by the coach to gather additional information from newly raised questions. It could mean a modeling from the coach or observing another teacher for understanding a new strategy. The next step may be the coach repeating an observation to see if an idea (change) that emerged from conferencing creates the desired change in what student do.

**Summarize and Check for Related Environments**– Often the follow up (action) from a post conference will involve some action on the coach's part as well as the teachers. It might mean assisting with gathering certain information or connecting the teacher with a resource. I find that confirming intentions … setting the expectations that the partners have of each other… sets the stage for building relationship. "So your plan is to have students note their ideas on white boards before sharing in talk with their partners to see if this increases the involvement of the more reluctant participants and you'd like me to observe a future lesson paying particular attention to the students we identified from today's observation." Getting an affirmative response, the coach asks, "When would you want to do that follow up observation?". Note this is what I describe as the post conference turning into a pre-conference. Kayhan suggests that before taking action the teacher examines how the action fits into their environment. How does the action fit into school philosophy, administrative guidelines? What implications do I see the action having for me as well as my students? This is the spot where I apply the prediction question, "What's the worst case scenario along with the best?".

Thanks Kayhan for providing another structure for guiding collegial support. We do all need companions!

Click here to read Kayhan's blog.