Podcast: Coaching Specific Teaching Skills

In this week's episode of the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast, Steve explores his thoughts around coaching specific teacher skills.

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PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Announcer: 00:00 Take a deeper dive with Steve Barkley in one of his five books. Available in electronic and printed formats, add Steve's books to your district's resources or to your personal collection at barkleypd.Com/Books.

Steve [Intro]: 00:14 Hello and welcome to the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. For over three decades, I've had the opportunity to learn with educators at all levels, both nationally and internationally. I invite you to listen as I explore my thoughts and learning on a variety of topics connected to teaching, learning and leading with some of the best and brightest educators from around the globe. Thanks for listening in.

Steve: 00:42 Coaching specific teaching skills. Very early in my caree,r I had been teaching a few years and was wrapping up a master's degree program when I enrolled in a course called Project Teach, which stood for teacher effectiveness and classroom handling. The course focused on 12 verbal communication skills. Four that related to uncovering agenda. These were questioning and paraphrasing skills. Another four that dealt with responding to resistance. So there were things like positive phrasing and empathy, support and approval. And then lastly, a set of four skills that dealt with decision making in the classroom and they ran a continuum from teacher being a power keeper to a power sharer to a power giver. I had an awareness as I was working in this program that it was the first time in my teacher education, both undergraduate and graduate, where the focus was specifically on a set of skills that were related to being an effective teacher.

Steve: 02:06 I think prior to that, most of my work was built around an understanding or knowledge that teachers had. But this was the first time that I specifically in the learning setting, practiced and got feedback on a set of skills. In that learning situation, we frequently practiced in role-plays using a group of three where one of us played the teacher, one, a student and the third, the observer. In those settings, I learned the importance of conscious practice in order to learn a skill. Interesting that as teachers, we were always focused on creating conscious practice opportunities for our students, but this was the first time that it was zeroing in on that conscious practice for myself. In those role play scenarios, when a person was the teacher, we had to label for the observer what skill it was that we were going to practice. And then the observer listened and reinforced that we use the skill we said we were going to use or interrupted and had us modify and try the practice activity again.

Steve: 03:36 Those experiences strongly connect to the early research done by Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers dating back

to the 80s and repeated many times since, regarding the value of coaching on professional development's ability to to impact student learning. The coaching creates the continuous, conscious practice on the part of the teachers and getting needed feedback in order for the teacher to internalize a skill that was identified in the professional development setting. Another interesting outcome from those experiences with those role plays was how much one learned when you were in the observer's seat. We used to jokingly laugh that when I was the observer, I knew exactly what the teacher should say and do. And as soon as the roles shifted and I moved from observer to teacher, I found I didn't have near the clarity I did when I was in the observer role.

Steve: 04:52 Again, this reinforces for me the value of connecting peer coaching to professional development. So as a teacher, when I'm observing and giving feedback to another teacher who is focused on learning a skill, perhaps the same skill that I'm focused on learning in my own classroom, that observation time increases my understanding and has an impact on my practice when I go back into my own classroom. The term technical coaching can be applied to this type of coaching that is coaching that is specifically designed to focus on a skill that the teacher is practicing. As an example, if a teacher was examining how her use of pause time when questioning students can have an important impact on student critical thinking, she might invite a coach to come into her classroom and observe the length of pauses after her question before she called on a student as well as after a student's response, before she gave feedback or moved on.

Steve: 06:06 Frequently, when teachers are engaged in this type of coaching, they'll suggest that the coach changed my behavior. Of course my pauses were better because the coach was present and sometimes teachers' initial response to that is that the that the coaching time was wasted. Instead of recognizing that what the coaching time did was to cause the

teacher to consciously practice the skill. And that conscious practice is critical to the teacher's internalization of that skill. When designing professional development that is focused on specific teachers skills to generate identified student learning production behaviors, consider providing the teachers with a coaching observation tool that they can use to request technical coaching feedback from instructional coaches, administrators, or peers. I think teachers actually leaving the professional development activity with that tool in hand and with an expectation that they will be requesting that technical coaching is an important part of the professional development learning activity. Here's some examples where teachers could request that technical coaching. A teacher is looking at how she responds in a reading group to encourage beginning readers to use their word attack skills. A teacher is examining the questions that probe students' initial answers to drive them to deeper thinking.

Steve: 07:59 A teacher is looking at the facilitative skills he's using in conducting a Socratic seminar. A teacher is examining how she checks for understanding during instruction. A teacher is focused on the use of a think aloud during a modeling activity.

Steve: 08:25 And a teacher might focus on how she responds to students' questions that engage further students struggle rather than giving the student a solution. In each of these cases, the coach can clearly collect specific data that reinforces for the teacher his or her use of that skill. And again, just that the coach is there collecting the data increases the teacher's conscious practice. When conducting a preconference with teachers, I often ask the teacher, what is the most important student learning production behavior needed in the learning activity? Meaning, what is critical that students do? Perhaps the thinking process I need students to use or the trial and error process that I want students practicing, getting the teacher to first identify what that

student learning production behavior is. I then follow that with what teacher behaviors will you want to consciously focus on in order to gain those student behaviors?

Steve: 09:48 After having the teacher explore both the student learning production behaviors and the critical teacher behaviors, I asked the teacher where she would like my focus to be during the learning activity so that I can provide feedback that would be helpful to the teacher. Sometimes the teacher will ask me to focus on the student behaviors. Sometimes he'll ask me to focus on the teacher and sometimes I'll be asked to focus on both. When I'm asked to focus on both, I'll often use a T chart for my recording tool. On the left hand side I'll record the teacher behavior or action and on the right hand side I'll record students' reactions to that teacher action. So for example, I might record on the right hand side a question that the student asked the teacher. Then come back to the left hand side and record the response the teacher gave to the student's question and then go back to the right hand side to record either the students next question, response, or action that the student took.

Steve: 11:09 This T chart allows a teacher to examine the flow and the connectedness between teacher behaviors and student behaviors. Video recording can also be pretty valuable here in collecting technical feedback for the teacher because the coach is aware of the teacher's desired focus. The coach just using a recording device on their phone can capture those specific teacher use of skill or specific teacher responses and several of those clips can allow the teacher some extremely valuable feedback as well as the coach's presence with the recording device keeps the teacher consciously focused on the skill that he's practicing. Consider how as a coach or administrator leader, you might want to model the value of technical coaching for your staff. A principal might ask an instructional coach to have a preconference with her at the start of a faculty meeting. She shares in that pre-

conference that she wants to engage the staff in critical thinking during a discussion of standards based grading.

Steve: 12:48 The principal might identify that she knows she needs to be conscious of the questions that she asks. The time that she gives teachers in small groups for discussion. And critical is the way that she responds to comments that are made both while observing small groups and as comments are shared out to the whole group. She recognizes that as the principal as well as being the facilitator, her responses can extend the thinking that's occurring or close or shut down the thinking. That conversation in a preconference can lead to the principal and the coach agreeing that the coach will record the questions that the principal asks and the coach will record the responses that the principal makes to teachers' comments or teachers' questions. This collected data will then be used in a post conference conversation between the principal and the coach. This principal can share how the value of that technical coaching is allowing her to continually develop important skills of facilitation. Modeling the value of coaching feedback that drives conscious continuous practice for skill development is an important leadership behavior. How might you find ways to model this for your staff? Thanks for listening. Thanks again for listening. You can subscribe to Steve Markley out loud

Steve [Outro]: 14:52 On iTunes and Podbean and please remember to rate and review us on iTunes. I also want to hear what you're pondering. You can find me on twitter @stevebarkley or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.