

---

# 1

## **The Next Generation of Coaching . . . Coaching Student Learning**

**M**ost educators are in agreement that the goal of school-based coaching is to improve student learning by providing continuous, relevant, and job-embedded support to teachers. But now that coaching is firmly rooted in many of our schools, and becoming newly established in others, we have to wonder about its impact. We have to consider whether coaching is improving student learning as we had hoped it would. And if it hasn't, we have to reconsider the approach we've taken thus far so we can ensure that coaching impacts our students in meaningful ways.

### **What Is Student-Centered Coaching?**

Student-centered coaching is about (1) setting specific targets for students that are rooted in the standards and curriculum and (2) working collaboratively to ensure that the targets are met. Rather than focusing on how teachers feel or on the acquisition of a few simple skills, we measure our impact based on student learning.

Coaching often centers exclusively on the actions taken by the teacher—making the assumption that if we improve the teaching, then student learning will improve as well. There is some logic to this approach, but unfortunately an unintended outcome is we've spent so

much time thinking about what teachers *should* be doing that we've lost touch with the most important people in our schools . . . the students.

As a leader in the field of professional development, Thomas Guskey has argued for a more student-centered approach for close to two decades. He writes, "In most cases, program effectiveness is judged by an index of participants' satisfaction with the program or some indication of change in their professional knowledge. Rarely is change in professional practice considered, and rarer still is any assessment of impact on student learning" (1995, p. 116). It's time to rethink how we define coaching and put our students front and center.

## **A Natural Connection to Formative Assessment**

As an educator, you no doubt understand that teaching is about applying the curriculum in a way that best addresses the needs of any given group of students. Achieving this depends on the identification of (1) what the students know; (2) what the standards, curriculum, or program deems they need to know; and (3) how to design and implement instruction to meet these needs. Achieving this requires educators to formatively assess students and adjust the instruction accordingly. On paper this may sound simple, but in practice that is far from the case. It is a complex process that requires the following knowledge:

- Teachers understand how to apply a variety of methods, techniques, and strategies to formatively assess students throughout their learning.
- Teachers have a well-developed knowledge of the standards and curriculum they teach.
- Teachers draw from a deep well of instructional strategies and practices to promote student learning.

Formative assessment is a core element of student-centered coaching because it helps teachers understand how to use student evidence to drive their decision making and meet the students' needs. In their seminal work on formative assessment in the mid-1990s, Wiliam and Black (1996) write, "In order to serve a formative function, an assessment must yield evidence that, with appropriate construct-referenced interpretations, indicates the existence of a gap between actual and desired levels of performance, and suggests actions that are in fact successful in closing the gap." They further note that "all assessments can be summative, but only some have the additional capability of serving formative functions" (p. 543). W. James Popham concurs and through his work with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) has come to define formative assessment as follows: "Formative assessment is a



## Framing Coaching Around a Goal for Student Learning

Recently I had the opportunity to coach Kristi, a language arts teacher at a middle school in Rapid City, South Dakota. As a consultant, I was there to model student-centered coaching for a group of literacy coaches from across the district. It was the second week of school and we were feeling that sense of possibility for a new school year that you only feel in those first weeks of school.

Kristi and I had talked the week prior to begin the planning process. She shared that since it was the second week of school, she was feeling out the group and trying to reinforce the importance of reading. She clearly valued independent reading, but wanted the time to be used productively. She also wanted to make sure the students didn't get bogged down in difficult text and wanted to be aware of whether they were able to comprehend what they read.

From our first conversation, I could tell Kristi knew a lot about teaching reading. My role would be to think alongside her rather than serve as an "expert" who was coming in to tell her how to teach. In the past, I may have jumped in and began tossing ideas to Kristi. And honestly, that would have been my response as a literacy coach in years past. But my thinking about coaching has changed since then, and now I am working on being less about a set of teaching ideas and more about student learning. This shift has come from years of worry about my impact as a coach. There were too many times when I felt great about my coaching work initially—only to see little to no lasting affect on the *kids*, probably because I was focusing all my attention on the *teacher*.

As I listened to Kristi's thoughts about her instruction, I wondered how I could serve her best in the coaching session. I didn't want it to be a dog-and-pony show but instead wanted to truly add value to her work with her students. So, today it wouldn't be about my ideas. Instead it would be about designing instruction for Kristi's students. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) write,

Deliberate and focused instructional design requires us as teachers and curriculum writers to make an important shift in our thinking about the nature of our job. The shift involves thinking a great deal, first, about the specific learnings sought, and the evidence of such learnings, before thinking about what we, as the teacher, will do or provide in teaching and learning activities. (p. 14)

With this in mind, I asked her, "What will it look like if your students successfully manage their way through difficult text?" By

asking this, I shifted the conversation away from which teaching techniques Kristi could build into the lesson and toward student learning. She sat back, thought for a few minutes, and named the following goals:

1. The students will be able to recognize where they get confused.
2. The students will be able to verbalize what is confusing them.
3. The students will be able to repair their comprehension.

These goals didn't trip off Kristi's tongue, but instead were the product of thoughtful conversation and reflection. They were there when we began our conversation, but the dialogue we shared helped Kristi cull them down to a set of clear and measurable indicators of student learning. Now that we both understood her goals for the students, we could plan backward and think about the lesson. She explained, "I want to begin by defining the word metacognition as 'Paying attention to what you read so you know what you understand and what confuses you.' Then I will model how I am metacognitive when I read challenging text with *Into Thin Air* by Jon Krakauer [1997]. I think I'll stop a few times to share some strategies that I use to make sense of the text. Then I'll ask the students to do the same with a challenging excerpt from *Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World* by Jennifer Armstrong [1998]."

As I listened, I was thinking about how we could be sure we had enough concrete student evidence to guide our decision making in the debriefing session, so I asked, "What kinds of work will the students produce that we can use to guide our debriefing session?" She thought and said, "If I ask them to write notes in the margin, would that work?" I agreed that this would provide us with concrete student evidence. I also volunteered to carefully observe the students and collect more evidence while Kristi taught the lesson. That way we would have even more evidence to draw on. We both felt much more comfortable focusing on the students, and I was secretly relieved that I didn't have to have all the answers. We would let the students teach us what we needed to do next.

## Collecting Student Evidence

The moment I walked into Kristi's classroom, I noticed that it didn't look like a typical middle school classroom. The overhead lights were turned off and lamps cast a soft glow. Floor-to-ceiling shelves housed a classroom library, and tables were organized in groups to allow for

conversation among the students. As they arrived in class, the students immediately began reading from their self-selected chapter books. You could have heard a pin drop in the classroom full of adolescent girls and boys hunched over their books.

As Kristi prepared to teach the lesson, I took some time to reread the indicators that Kristi had shared in the planning conversation. I wanted be sure to stay focused so that the evidence we discussed in the debriefing session would be directly tied to what she was looking for. Since Kristi was building community with her students, she requested that I observe her during the lesson. This made a lot of sense and I busied myself with collecting student evidence that matched her goals for the students. Other options for the time a coach spends in the classroom include modeling instruction and co-teaching. Co-teaching is the most common for me when I'm engaged in a student-centered coaching cycle. When I'm in a teacher-centered coaching cycle, I find myself modeling instruction on a regular basis. It depends on my purpose as a coach, the relationship I have with the teacher, and the teacher's instructional knowledge and expertise. I've found that asking teachers what they are most comfortable with is the way to go.

After Kristi's modeling, I observed the students working through the text to see which of the indicators they were demonstrating. I moved around the classroom while the students were reading and recording their thinking, and I also took careful notes while they discussed their thinking during the share session. For the most part, I didn't speak much to the kids, and when I did, I asked open-ended questions like, "What did you do as a reader? What are you running into when you read this?" These open-ended questions provided me with lots of information to add to my notes and bring to the debriefing session. For a sample of my notes, see the "Tools and Techniques" section at the end of this chapter.

The bell rang for passing period, and we collected the students' work and made our way down to the conference room to see how they did. I looked forward to the conversation because not only was there substantial evidence that Kristi was already impacting the students as readers, but I imagined we would have an interesting conversation about where Kristi might go from here.

## **Debriefing Using Student Work**

Student work (or data) is at the heart of student-centered coaching. Without student work, coaching quickly slips toward being more about teaching practice and less about student learning. Student work

keeps coaching conversations grounded and specific, and propels student learning. There are many types of student work that can inform coaching conversations, and the key is deciding what would be the most relevant given the teacher's goals for the students. Examples of student work include written responses to reading, writing samples, assignments from a subject area like math or science, formal and informal assessment data, interim or benchmark assessments, anecdotal records, conferring notes, and student observation data.

After a few minutes of reflection, Kristi and I decided to dive right into the stack of student work. I suggested we sort it into three piles with similar characteristics and she agreed. We immediately noticed that a group of five students coded where they got confused and wrote down inferences to repair their understanding. They wrote things like "I'm wondering why this happened. I think it might be because . . ." These students were demonstrating exactly what Kristi had hoped for: they were thinking metacognitively and were making inferences to repair their comprehension. A much larger group of fourteen students coded several places where they were confused but didn't take the step of repairing their comprehension. With this group, we noticed that most of the notes were vocabulary-type questions such as circling words they didn't understand, writing a question mark in the margin, or writing phrases like "huh?" to indicate a lack of word knowledge. A handful of students didn't write any notes while reading. This worried Kristi. They didn't seem to be monitoring their comprehension at all and she knew this had to be established so they could continue to read and comprehend text.

After we sorted the work, I asked Kristi what she thought. She rubbed her hands through her hair and said, "I'm curious what surfaced because of my teaching. I think I need to model this again." Like so many teachers, Kristi was being way too hard on herself, so I pointed out that most of the student work showed clear evidence of some aspects of metacognition. She thought for a moment and said, "I'm happy that they were able to identify when they got confused and some even were able to repair their comprehension, but I want them to be metacognitive in more ways than just when it comes to vocabulary. And it's funny because now that I think about it, that is what I modeled in the lesson. When I did my think aloud, I really did focus on the tough vocabulary, I think because that's what the text lent itself to." This was an aha! moment for Kristi and spoke to the fact that her students were simply following her lead. In a way it gave her comfort because she knew that by providing different types of modeling, she could extend them as readers.

For Kristi, the next steps were quite clear. She now had a good sense of who needed extra support so she could more easily differentiate her instruction to the three groups that had presented themselves. She would do this by varying the texts they read and pulling some small groups. She also identified some examples from students who were demonstrating all three of the indicators and she would use these to model for the rest of the class. Finally, she planned to extend her modeling to include other ways readers get confused beyond the word level, such as at the phrase or sentence level, and this she would do with the whole class. Due to Kristi's expertise, she had no problem envisioning these next steps. But for a teacher with less background, I wouldn't have hesitated to help craft the next steps and maybe even offer to co-teach or model a few lessons alongside the teacher.

Kristi's next steps made sense and were rooted in what the students were demonstrating were their needs. I didn't have the usual coachlike worries about whether or not she would follow through because Kristi really owned these next steps. She was committed because of her desire to support her students, not to please me. As we wrapped up, I asked her if our work together was helpful and she said, "I would not have initially thought to sort the student work in this way. This process made it easier for me to look at "next steps" in my instruction. Our focus remained on student work throughout our conversation. This really helped me learn more from the student work that is in front of me every day. And now that I've done it, I hope to do more of this type of reflection on my own."

The student work helped us drill down to specific student needs in minutes. Without the student work, we would have stayed on the surface, reflecting on what Kristi did and what she could have done differently (a typical coaching conversation). Analyzing the student work allowed us to address Kristi's teaching practice because when you see something happening with your students, the natural next step is to problem-solve what to do about it. In Kristi's case, she had no trouble deciding how she would differentiate for her students and simultaneously think about how she would adapt her instruction. Herein lies the power of student-centered coaching—by focusing on students you are able to address teaching practice as well.

## **The Connection Between Goals for Student Learning and Teaching Practice**

In a recent report in *Edutopia* (2009), Linda Darling-Hammond writes, "In the last ten years there's been a lot of research done about what



makes a difference for student achievement, and it's now clear that the single most important determinant of what students learn is what their teachers know. Teacher qualifications, teacher's knowledge and skills, make more difference for student learning than any other single factor." The work of Darling-Hammond and other researchers in the area of professional development have helped create a school environment that provides high-quality support for teachers within the work day. With these structures in place, we now have the opportunity to draw upon these powerful systems for professional development and shift the lens more directly on the students. By focusing the lens on students, we can diffuse the existing pressures we feel related to "resistant" teachers since the focus isn't on improving *them* but instead is on improving the achievement of their students. Furthermore, these structures help us build a community of teachers who are skilled at analyzing student work to make decisions that best support student learning.

Several years ago, I received a request from Pam for some help. I was surprised when I received the request because, until then, Pam had been reluctant to engage in coaching even though I had approached her several times. She was a brand-new teacher who had been assigned some of the most challenging students in the fourth grade. I wanted to help, but knew that she had to be ready for it.

I began spending time in her classroom and noticed that her students were raking her over the coals on a daily basis. I realized she was suffering more than I had realized and wondered if that may have been the reason why she was hesitant to invite me in. In an attempt to get order with her students, the desks in her classroom were set up in rows, and I suggested we move them into groups so we could work together to build a more respectful community in her classroom. She halfheartedly agreed and we stayed late on a Friday afternoon rearranging desks. I would be back on Tuesday so we could start co-teaching lessons that would build community and set some expectations for her students.

When I arrived on Tuesday morning, I was shocked. The desks were back in rows and it had only been two days! I was dumbstruck. Luckily she raised the issue and confessed, "I just couldn't take it. They were talking and I couldn't get them to do their work so I moved them back last night." She made it clear that there wouldn't be any more desk moving, and as her coach I wasn't sure what to do next.

Pam is a good example of how reluctant teachers respond to teacher-centered coaching. She seemed to be on board with the coaching, but when it came time to challenge her beliefs and practices about teaching, she drew a line in the sand. Pam is the type of teacher

who likes her students to be in rows, and I can't teach kids unless they are in groups. In a teacher-centered coaching model, my goal would be to get Pam to come around to my way of thinking, and if she didn't, she may even be labeled as a "resistant" teacher.

I didn't want to do that and realized that I needed a new approach. I decided to ask Pam to think about what she wanted her students to be able to do as learners. I was a little bit nervous to throw this question out there since she was a brand-new teacher. I didn't want to intimidate her, but I decided it couldn't hurt to ask. She immediately zeroed in on some work she was doing with science notebooks, "I want my kids to be able to use their science notebooks more effectively. Right now, I'm not getting much out of them."

Even though it was a little bit vague, I knew we could get more specific as we went. I figured we might as well start there rather than with me redecorating her classroom because taking this step would hopefully help us rally together around a common goal for her students.

Our first step was to figure out how her students were doing with their science notebooks. Pam was planning to do an experiment on the water cycle that week, so we decided to assess the students with the lesson she had already planned. I didn't want her to be anxious and assured her that whatever the students did with the assignment would be just fine and that I'd be there to help her figure out what to do next. She smiled and admitted, "I actually don't know what they are supposed to be able to do. I was really just focused on how to set up the experiment." This was a great opportunity to use the science standards alongside the notebooks, so we took a look at them and found three expectations for her grade level that she felt comfortable taking on. They included (1) students develop a hypothesis that is based on background knowledge, (2) students explain the steps they used to test the hypothesis, and (3) students explain how their thinking changed as a result of the experiment. To collect some assessment data, we created a simple entry for the science notebooks for the water cycle experiment.

We asked the students to do the following:

In your science notebooks explain the following:  
What was your hypothesis?

How did you test your hypothesis?

In what ways did your thinking change during the experiment?

We provided very little support to students as they moved through the assignment so we could measure what they could do at an independent level. And sure enough, we noticed some clear patterns when we looked over their work. Many students were able to write a simple hypothesis like, "I think the water will evaporate." A few included background knowledge in the hypothesis, such as, "I think the water will evaporate because it is like rainwater evaporating from the street." Most of the students were even able to explain the steps they took to test the hypothesis. But where they fell short was explaining how their thinking changed as a result of the experiment. Many of the students simply restated their hypothesis, probably because they didn't have any idea what else to do.

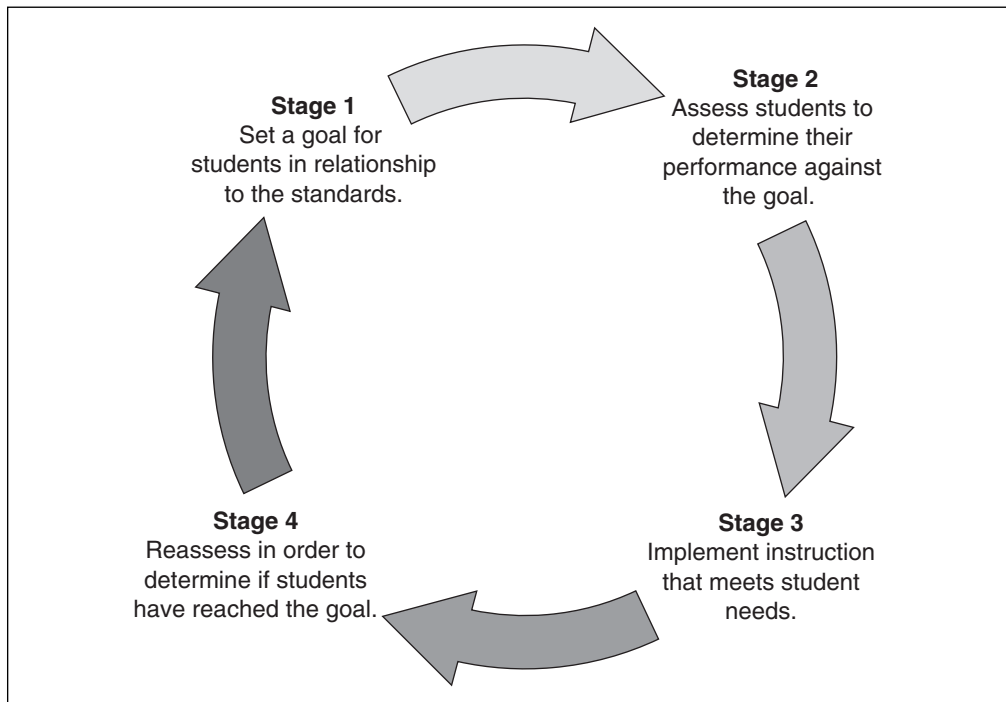
Pam and I had a clear course. We knew that we didn't need to spend much time teaching the students how to write the steps in an experiment and that many understood how to write a hypothesis. So we decided to focus on including background knowledge as well as teaching the students to track how their thinking changes as they move through an experiment. We drew on some of the thinking strategies for reading that Pam was familiar with, and also made connections to the thinking that students were doing in math. We spent the next six weeks in an intensive coaching cycle that included the following:

- We arranged a weekly planning session to analyze student work and plan lessons.
- Once in a while I modeled lessons but we mostly co-taught lessons because I wanted to build Pam's confidence and experience level.
- After six weeks of working together, we reassessed the students by using a similar experiment and could tangibly see that they had met the goals that we had set at the beginning of our work together.

I vowed never again to mention the desk thing but about halfway through our coaching cycle, Pam brought it up. She said, "You know, I think we need to figure out a way to allow them to turn and explain their thinking in pairs so that they get used to it before they go to write it in their science notebooks. We may want to move their desks back into groups so they can do that." I smiled to myself and realized that by focusing the coaching on her students, Pam was able to move forward in her teaching practice as well. Student behavior also

improved over the course of the coaching cycle due to the fact that the students became more engaged in meaningful and collaborative learning. Figure 1.2 shows the process Pam and I went through from start to finish across our six-week coaching cycle (for more on setting up coaching cycles, see Chapter 2).

**Figure 1.2** Stages in a Student-Centered Coaching Cycle



## Meanwhile . . . in the Principal's Office

Many principals are concerned with a handful of struggling teachers. They know something needs to be done and a common strategy is to create a subtle (or not-so-subtle) campaign to fix these teachers. This approach can put the coach in a tricky position because at times, teachers withdraw due to feelings of apprehension, fear, and judgment. Student-centered coaching is designed to diffuse some of these fears but also hold teachers accountable for student achievement. Leading this type of coaching effort requires a specific skill set for principals that includes the following:

## **The Principal Understands the Purpose, Potential, and Practices for Student-Centered Coaching**

Student-centered coaching requires a principal who understands the rationale and practices for this type of coaching and articulates with confidence how the coaching will positively impact students. This can be challenging because by now, many teachers have experienced some sort of teacher-centered coaching and we are working within a paradigm that has already been established. Making the shift to student-centered coaching means we have to orient (or reorient) teachers around a new vision of coaching.

Principals can benefit from studying the core components of student-centered coaching alongside their coaches. When the core practices for student-centered coaching are understood by the school leader, the leader can more readily articulate it as a valuable tool for helping teachers reach their goals for students, which, in turn, encourages teachers to fully engage in the process.

## **The Principal Holds Teachers Accountable for a Specific Set of Instructional Practices That Are Based on the Standards and Curriculum**

It is not the coach's job to hold teachers accountable for implementing a specific curriculum or set of practices. This is the role of the school leader. Principals who support student-centered coaching put pressure on teachers and hold them accountable for practices that are based on the standards and curriculum. They view the coach as a source of support to help teachers get there.

## **The Principal Builds a Culture of Learning in the School**

For student-centered coaching to succeed, we have to adopt a learning stance schoolwide. No longer are there "veteran" teachers who have it all figured out and "newbie" teachers who don't. No longer is the principal a manager who oversees the basic operations of the school. Instead, we are all learners in a venture to more directly address the needs of our students. Roland Barth (1995) writes, "The more crucial role of the principal is as head learner, engaging in the most important enterprise of the schoolhouse—experiencing, displaying, modeling, and celebrating what it is hoped and expected that teachers and pupils will do" (p. 80).

## The Principal Navigates the Complexities of Adult Learning

Navigating the landscape of adult learning can be tricky, and the more school leaders understand about adult learners, the better position they are in to support the coaching effort. Factors such as coaching across learning styles, genders, and generation are explored in Chapter 8.

## Tools and Techniques

### Note-Taking Tools

How I observe teachers and take notes has changed as I've become more student centered in my coaching work. In the past, I used a two-column note-taking format where I wrote my questions and ideas on one side and a description of the lesson on the other (Figure 1.3). In the debriefing session, I shared my thinking and ideas with the teacher and assumed that he or she would run off to use the myriad of brilliant teaching strategies that I suggested. Now, when I spend time in the classroom, the lens is on the students. I focus my attention on collecting evidence about what the students do using a note-taking tool that is designed for this purpose (Figure 1.4).

**Figure 1.3** Teacher-Centered Coaching Notes

<i>Questions/Thoughts/Ideas:</i>	<i>Lesson:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many students are ELL?</li> <li>• I wonder what type of comprehension instruction students have had in the earlier grades?</li> <li>• A next step might be to have the students do this in other genres.</li> <li>• Some struggling readers will need extra help.</li> <li>• How will this happen?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher defines metacognition.</li> <li>• Teacher reads aloud from <i>Into Thin Air</i>.</li> <li>• Students are quiet and engaged.</li> <li>• Teacher writes her thinking in the margins of the text and talks with the students about why she was confused by the text.</li> <li>• Teacher hands out the excerpt from <i>Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World</i> and students begin reading and jotting notes in the margins.</li> <li>• Students raise hands when they need clarification.</li> <li>• Some students talk to one another in a productive manner.</li> <li>• A few students share at the end of the class period; they focus on what they did to get unstuck.</li> </ul>

**Figure 1.4** Student-Centered Coaching Notes

<p><i>Indicators:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The students will be able to recognize where they get confused</li> <li>2. The students will be able to verbalize what is confusing them</li> <li>3. The students will be able to repair their comprehension</li> </ol>
<p><i>Evidence:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When I asked, several students were able to name a place in the text that confused them, i.e., Charise, Michael, Javier, Renee (Indicator #1)</li> <li>• Students worked to figure it out before moving on in their reading, i.e., Mayra, Conner, Renee (Indicators #1 and #3)</li> <li>• Most students' confusion came from vocabulary words. They were able to note which words were confusing them (Indicator # 2)</li> <li>• Almost all the students marked between three and five places that confused them mostly by circling unknown words, underlining a portion of the text, or writing a question mark in the margin (Indicator #1)</li> <li>• A few students wrote inferences in the margin as a tool for trying to repair their comprehension, i.e., Sammy, Lexi, Thomas (Indicator #3)</li> <li>• During the share session, students shared places where they got confused (Indicator #1), and some even shared how they went about thinking through ways to repair their comprehension, i.e., Madison, Charise, Christopher (Indicator #3)</li> </ul>

## Student-Centered Coaching Rubric

The following assessment is a guide to reflect on both the principal's and coach's progress toward establishing a student-centered effort. This portion is one of several traits in the rubric, and the full rubric is available in the Resources (Figure 1.5).

**Figure 1.5** Student-Centered Coaching Rubric

<b>Trait: Understands and Implements Student-Centered Coaching</b>			
	<i>Accomplished</i>	<i>Developing</i>	<i>Novice</i>
The coach . . .	Student learning directly and consistently informs coaching conversations. The coach seamlessly guides the conversation from student learning to other factors, such as the implementation of a program or curriculum, and classroom routines.	The coach is beginning to draw on student data in coaching sessions. The coach is more capable in addressing other factors such as the implementation of a program or curriculum, and classroom routines in the context of student learning.	The coach rarely draws from student data in coaching sessions. Coaching is consistently focused on teaching practice, implementation of a program or curriculum, or classroom routines.

(Continued)

**Figure 1.5 (Continued)**

	<i>Accomplished</i>	<i>Developing</i>	<i>Novice</i>
The school leader . . .	The principal understands the core practices for student-centered coaching, subscribes to those practices, and provides support to move the coach's work forward.	The principal has some knowledge of the core practices for student-centered coaching or may question its value.	The principal is not supportive of, or lacks knowledge in, the core practices for student-centered coaching.
	The principal provides the necessary pressure and support to the adult learners in the school.	The principal is beginning to find a balance between providing the adequate pressure and support to the adult learners in the school.	The principal has not yet achieved a balance of providing pressure and support to the adult learners in the school.

*Note:* See the Resources for the full rubric.

## Language for Student-Centered Coaching

Coaches often ask me for ideas about what language to use in their coaching conversations. The following questions are simple and help keep the conversation focused on student learning (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005).

- What is it we want all students to learn?
- How will we know when each student has mastered the essential learning?
- How will we respond when a student experiences initial difficulty in learning?
- How will we deepen the learning for students who have already mastered the essential knowledge and skills? (p. 15)

Others guiding questions that I like:

- In a perfect world, describe to me what the learning would look like among your students?
- What is your goal for students in this lesson? How will that look?
- How will we collect evidence to see what they can do?
- What are our next steps based on the evidence we collected?



## A Final Thought

It is my firm belief that educators are more comfortable when the conversation puts student learning front and center. When this isn't the case, we tend to feel attacked or vulnerable to the judgments and opinions of others—entering into what Jim Knight terms a “vicious cycle” of blame. He writes (2007),

When educational leaders see their one-shot programs failing to catch fire, they start searching for reasons for that failure. Not surprisingly, teachers are often blamed for “resisting change.” In turn, teachers, feeling slighted by their leaders, tell each other “this too will pass” whenever a new innovation is introduced. Ultimately, both educational leaders and teachers get caught in a vicious cycle of blame and resistance. (p. 3)

By changing the focus from fixing teachers to improving student learning, the coaching paradigm can take on new meaning for us all. And lest we forget, coaches cannot do this alone. We need our school leader to stand by our side to see the vision of school-based coaching to reality.