Partnerships for Literacy

Systems Coaching Practices for P4L Teams

This document contains lists of coaching practices and examples of what you might see/hear in a coaching relationship for: (1) Effective Communication with the team, (2) Organization and Structure of the coaching, and (3) Capacity-Building for the team.

# Effective Communication

## **Coaches use effective communication strategies**

1. Pausing to allow time for active listening and processing of information.

Coach helps pace the conversation to allow time for processing and questioning. During discussions, silence is not seen as something negative but as a time for people to process information. Coach knows when to give the next prompt to move the conversation.

1. Paraphrasing to signify understanding, acknowledge emotion, and shift conversation level.

Coach summarizes to acknowledge understanding of content and feeling, organizes and connects ideas and creates entry for individuals to be reflective about their thoughts and comments.

1. Presuming positive intention to convey acceptance, trust, and respect.

Coach establishes a non-threatening environment, uses non-evaluative comments. The language of the coach indicates trust and conveys the coach’s belief that participants are knowledgeable and will be active in the process.

1. Powerful questioning to deepen and extend thinking.

Coach asks authentic questions that elicit responses that move the conversation forward. To be an authentic question, the coach cannot already know the answer or have decided what the answer should be.

## **Coaches provide feedback**

1. Feedback is action-focused and contingent on progress towards specified goals/criteria.

Feedback is not a retelling of observations or list of problem areas but, instead, focuses on suggestions for changing future behaviors. Feedback is based on relevant data from multiple sources.

1. Feedback challenges assumptions that may be interfering with attainment of team goals.

Coach recognizes that habits of mind are interfering with progress and addresses the issue directly.

Example: Coach tells principal, “How might you respond when you hear people say that they have tried everything and nothing has worked?”

1. Feedback positively reinforces, acknowledges and celebrates success.

Coach starts feedback session with positives of what is going well and asks others to share positives, as well. Coach presumes positive intent even when feedback refers to an area of improvement.

Example: Coach uses plus, delta strategy during meeting, always starting with pluses.

Coach asks “How might you share and celebrate your success with others in the district?”

## **Coaches maintain professional standards when communicating:**

1. Identifying and using the communication method (e.g., email, phone, in person) that is appropriate to the situation.

Coach is purposeful in choosing a communication method that meets an expressed need.Various communication methods serve different purposes and are better suited to some individuals/teams and topics/concerns than others.

Example: After attempting to coach through an issue by phone and email, coach may say “We do not seem to be moving forward with this, I wonder if it could be added to the agenda for our next meeting with the team?”

1. Building and maintaining rapport.

Coach uses “friendly” language, topics not specifically related to the work, warm and open body language (smiling, joking etc.). Although a coach may encounter situations that involve push-back or confrontation, the coach continues to try to establish or build rapport.

# Organization and Structure

## **Coaches are purposeful and prepared when structuring their work with coaching participants, as demonstrated by:**

1. Scheduling routine coaching sessions based on the need of the individuals/teams being coached and honoring the time committed to coaching.

Coach has identified the frequency, schedule, and duration of coaching customized to the Partnerships for Literacy process. The coaching process is documented on the Coaching Service Delivery Plan and everyone understands the coaching plan. The coaching process is efficient.

1. Ensuring mutual agreement of the purpose and scope of the coaching session.

The act of coaching is collaborative, purposeful, and involves a reciprocal relationship. Coaching is purposeful and intentional and must focus on accomplishing established goal(s). Movement toward the stated goals is documented. There is evidence of correlations between data and the established goal.

Example: Coach attends P4L meeting to observe use of the P4L tools and takes notes. Following the meeting, coach provides feedback to team and discusses improvement strategies. “As a result of completing the P4L Inventory, you chose to focus on supporting learning at home. Tell me about the steps you have taken so far to address this area of family engagement.”

1. Utilizing Stages of Concern and Levels of Use continuums to scaffold support that matches the needs of the team and the individuals on the team.

Coach assesses attitudes and perceptions based on “stages of concern,” and typical team behaviors based on “level of use” and applies interventions strategies based on those assessments. (<http://www.nas.edu/rise/backg4a.htm>)

Example: Hearing several team members commenting that they do not have time to contact families weekly to share updates on their child’s progress in the reading intervention program, coach utilizes coaching prompts to address time management issues and move team to a higher level of functioning.

## **Coaches establish an effective infrastructure for Systems coaching by working collaboratively with participant(s).**

1. Utilize implementation research and assessment of current practices to identify implementation strengths and challenges.

Coach prompts team to assess implementation and impact of current practices using the P4L tools, and connects practices to research on effective family engagement strategies that support language and literacy development.

Example: “Your plan to improve fidelity of using proactive and goal-linked communication methods with families sounds like a good start. Research shows that starting early and communicating positive feedback to families about their support of their child’s literacy development will improve student learning.”

1. Utilize data to focus on problem solving, action planning, and reflection.

Coach prompts team to analyze the P4L inventory results and student literacy data. Coach encourages a continuous cycle initiated to collect data, review data, plan strategies, implement strategies, and evaluate/improve strategies (e.g., Ohio’s 5-step process).

# Capacity Building

## **Coaches allow participant(s) to take ownership for their own problem identification, solutions, and reflection.**

1. Facilitating participant(s) review of relevant data, particularly student data.

Participants come prepared with data and reference student and adult-level data in their discussion. Coach addresses collection and use of data and makes connections of adult behavior as an antecedent to change/influence student learning/behavior.

Examples: “What is the data telling you?” “In looking at the student data, what conclusions do you draw as to what you need to do next?”

1. Supporting participant(s) to identify what is working well and strategies for celebrating their successes.

Coach acknowledges recent accomplishments or asks team to acknowledge recent accomplishments. Team sets standing agenda item to share progress and celebrations.

Examples: “What went well?” “Given the data we are reviewing, families appear to be capable of supporting their child’s literacy at home if given fun, interactive strategies and ideas with clear instructions.”

1. Providing opportunities for participant(s) to identify necessary changes to current practice, possible actions, and how changes will improve outcomes.

This item embodies the solution-orientation of the coaching work. It isn’t only about identifying the issue/challenge, but about providing opportunities for the coaching recipient(s) to brainstorm and identify possible solutions, followed by the reinforcing support of the coach in honoring their possible solutions and expanding on the ideas as appropriate.

1. Supporting changes in practice by assisting participant(s) to generate evidence/examples of how or where content/practice is currently being used effectively.

Examples of content/practice in use may be from coach or the person(s) being coached.

Example: “I wonder if we can generate some examples of where (family engagement strategy) is being implemented with fidelity in our building that others could observe.”

1. Assessing the need for guided practice and offering opportunities or resources, if needed.

Coach makes note of specific interests and ideas of the group members, and offers suggestions.

Example: Coach provides website links where teachers can get more information and examples of how to listen well with families (e.g., journaling back and forth with families, or setting up regular phone calls to listen) and asks if anyone would be willing to commit to bringing a sample project to practice together at the next meeting.

1. Connecting implementation to results.

Coaches realize that moving from implementation science best practice to student outcomes is not automatic. Coaches help teams determine if lack of progress is due to fidelity of implementation or the strategy chosen to implement.

Example: Might hear coach say “Research shows that (family engagement practice) will contribute to student learning when done with fidelity to the model. How is implementation going.”

1. Facilitating team identification of next steps and personal commitments prior to next coaching session.

Individual or team leaves meeting with a focus for what they will do prior to next meeting (who/what/by when).

Examples: Coach says, “What are reasonable next steps? We’ve scheduled time to touch-base every other week. So over the next 2 weeks, what are some ideas you’d like to try out?”

“Let’s write down the plan. This will help us both remember.”

**Disclaimer:** These contents were developed under a grant from the US Department of Education, Office for Special Education Programs, Award No. H323A170026, Project Officer, Jennifer Coffey. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.