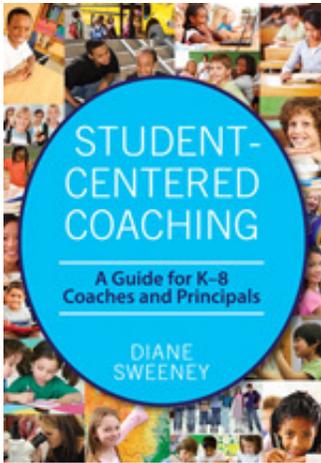# A Study Guide for Student-Centered Coaching

by Diane Sweeney   *3 Comments*

A Study Guide for *Student-Centered Coaching: A Guide for K-8 Coaches and Principals*

As teams and districts explore *Student-Centered Coaching (Sweeney, 2010),* a few have requested a study guide to support their dive into the processes and tools that are focused on throughout the book. I thought that a blog post might be a good opportunity to respond to this request and also include some key lessons that we have learned from working with schools and districts throughout the US and abroad. Please consider this study guide as a launching off point rather a destination. I'm sure you will need to fine tune the following questions to meet the needs of your own context. If you have any further questions, feel free to email us at info@dianesweeney.com.

Chapter 1: The Next Generation of Coaching…Coaching Student Learning
Lessons from the Field:
When working with teams of coaches, we almost always begin with a comparison of student-centered, teacher-centered, and relationship-driven coaching. This bit of thinking is referenced on Figure 1.1 on p. 9. Since the book was published, I have further developed the continuum and am now using the following figure to tease out these different modalities for coaching. It is useful in a few ways. First, it provides language to describe where we so often end up in our coaching work. It outlines the different purposes for coaching. Finally, it allows coaches to reflect on their own practice.

Since publishing the book, our team has landed on a much clearer set of practices that define Student-Centered Coaching. We have found that by honing in on the following practices, we can help teams more towards Student-Centered Coaching.

Seven Core Practices for Student-Centered Coaching

1. Setting student learning goals for coaching cycles
2. Creating learning targets for coaching cycles
3. Using student evidence to co-plan instruction
4. Organizing coaching through coaching cycles
5. Co-teaching with a focus on effective teaching practice
6. Measuring the impact of coaching on student and teacher learning
7. Partnering with the school leader

A Comparison: Student-Centered, Teacher-Centered, and Relationship-Driven Coaching

	More Impact on Students <<<<< ——— >>>>> Less Impact on Students		
	Student-Centered Coaching	**Teacher-Centered Coaching**	**Relationship-Driven Coaching**
Role	The coach partners with teachers to design learning that is based on a	The coach moves teachers towards implementing a program or set of	The coach provides support and resources to teachers.

	specific objective for student learning.	instructional practices.	
Focus	The focus is on using data and student work to analyze progress and collaborate to make informed decisions about instruction that is differentiated and needs-based.	The focus is on what the teacher is, or is not, doing and addressing it through coaching.	The focus is on providing support to teachers in a way that doesn't challenge or threaten them.
Use of Data	Formative assessment data and student work is used to determine how to design the instruction. Summative assessment data is used to assess progress towards mastery.	Summative assessment data is used to hold teachers accountable, rather than as a tool for instructional decision-making.	Data is rarely used in relationship-driven coaching.
Materials	Textbooks, technology, and curricular programs are viewed as tools for moving student learning to the next level.	The use of textbooks, technology, and curricular programs is the primary objective of the coaching.	Sharing access and information to textbooks, technology, and curricular programs is the primary focus of the coaching.
Perception of the Coach	The coach is viewed as a partner who is there to support teachers to move students towards mastery of the standards.	The coach is viewed as a person who is there to hold teachers accountable for a certain set of instructional practices.	The coach is viewed as a friendly source of support that provides resources when needed.
Role of Relationships	Trusting, respectful, and collegial relationships are a necessary component for all forms of coaching.		

Guiding Questions:

1. Which of these modalities are most represented by your coaching work? Why?
2. In what ways does your work ebb and flow across these modalities?
3. What are some reasons you may experience teacher-centered or relationship-driven coaching?
4. What are some strategies you might use to move in the direction of Student-Centered Coaching?

Chapter 2: Getting Student-Centered Coaching Up and Running

Lessons from the Field:

Launching coaching cycles is the first step, and potentially the first stumbling block, for many coaches. We like to frame this as a 'marketing campaign' for coaching, and to do it well, you need a clearly articulated vision that is well communicated and broad-based. A common question is who should participate in coaching cycles. Our response is simple, if Student-Centered Coaching is based on a goal for student learning, then it is for everyone. Therefore it becomes less about 'who' and more about 'when'. After all, don't we all have students with needs? This is quite a departure from the approach that coaching is something we assign to people who 'need help' or 'people who are struggling'.

Guiding Questions:

1. How can you include teams and individuals in your coaching cycles?
2. What are your beliefs about coaching? About student learning?
3. How will you communicate your vision to the teachers and principal in your school?

Chapter 3: Crafting a Culture of Learning

Lessons from the Field:

There is no question that relationships are the foundation for all forms of coaching. In his book, *Coaching: Evoking Excellence in Others,* James Flaherty writes, "Relationship is the first principle and the most important one. So let me say here simply that relationship is the background for all coaching efforts. The relationship must be one in which there is mutual respect, trust, and mutual freedom of expression" (p. 10).

We have found that in schools, relationship and culture are interconnected and powerful forces that dictate much of the success of a coaching effort. While we can provide you the tools and practices for Student-Centered Coaching, the school culture where you operate is also of vital importance. We have also learned that being a learner (as a coach or school leader) can contribute to the creating of a learning-oriented school culture. Many coaches feel that they have to 'be an expert' to be credible. We have found that being a learner takes you much further.

Guiding Questions:

1. How would you describe your school culture?
2. How do you maintain the stance of a learner as a coach or school leader?
3. What's your role in impacting the culture?
4. How can you work in partnership with the school leader to create a plan to establish a learning-oriented school culture?

Chapter 4: Data and Student-Centered Coaching

Lessons from the Field:

The other day I was leading an introduction to student-centered coaching in a large, urban school district. As I framed the core practice of using student evidence to plan instruction, a hand shot up in the room. A literacy coach said, "This makes so much sense. We talk so much about the students' reading levels, but that doesn't really get us to the level of practice. Using actual student work takes it to a whole new level." While there is certainly a place for data to monitor student progress, such as benchmark tests, interim assessments, etc. These forms of data don't necessarily inform teachers at the level we are going for. We want data to be in-the-moment, descriptive, and formative. Therefore, we work from student work samples, anecdotal notes, and other forms of performance assessments. We like to keep it short and sweet so that teachers aren't overwhelmed with the expectation to use student evidence to plan instruction. In the simplest terms, it's about talking with teachers about what makes the learning visible, and how we can use this information to plan the next lesson.

Guiding Questions:

1. What kinds of data inform your coaching conversations?

2. How do you plan lessons that are based on what students know and are able to do?
3. How have you aligned your coaching with the standards?
4. What role do learning targets play in your work?

Chapter 5: Measuring the Impact of Student-Centered Coaching

Lessons from the Field:

For me, there is no tool that has stood the test of time like the Results-Based Coaching Tool (p. 88). While at first glance, it might appear to be another piece of paperwork. The truth is it is a vehicle for Student-Centered Coaching. It keeps you on track and focused. And it helps you feel successful in your work with teachers. The Results-Based Coaching Tools isn't meant to be used to evaluate teachers or coaches, but rather to celebrate the impact coaching is making on student and teacher learning. Recently, we have begun to replace the paper version of the Results-Based Coaching Tool with one in Googledocs. We have found that doing so makes the process easier to manage, more transparent, and easier to use in small group coaching cycles.

Guiding Questions:

1. Have you used the Results-Based Coaching Tool? How did it go?
2. How do you know if coaching has impacted student and teacher learning?
3. What are some ways you use logs and templates to capture your impact?

Chapter 6: Student-Centered Classroom Observations

Lessons from the Field:

There is no question that teachers benefit from learning alongside one another, and learning labs are a great way to create rich opportunities for teachers to spend time in the classrooms of others. That said, classroom-based observations sometimes lack the focus, intentionality, and facilitation that is necessary to move learning forward. Or a greater risk is that they can be damaging to a school culture if not well orchestrated. We have learned that unhealthy school cultures are not the best place to implement learning labs. It is also less-than-ideal to highlight certain teachers as more effective than others. Again, this can damage the ever-so-sensitive cultures that we find in our schools. Rather, we like to design learning labs that celebrate adults as learners, risk takers, and askers of tough questions. We like to design learning labs that put the spotlight on challenges rather than perfection. And we like to design learning labs that keep the focus firmly rooted on student learning.

Guiding Questions:

1. Have you ever designed learning labs in your school? If so, what went well and what challenges did you encounter?
2. How might you connect learning labs to a broader framework of support for teachers?
3. What are some facilitation techniques that you have found helpful when facilitating observations in classrooms?
4. Where have you struggled as a facilitator? Why?

Chapter 7: Developing Systems and Structures for Teacher Learning

Lessons from the Field:

In today's era of teacher evaluation, it is easy for coaching to be identified as a way to 'fix' teachers. We have learned that if we view our role as *helping* teachers perform at a distinguished level on the evaluation rubric, then we are okay. We accomplish this by embedding the recommended instructional practices into our planning and co-teaching sessions with teachers. For example, we may pull out the Danielson Framework as a reference point. After all, it is full of great instructional practices that we can embed into our co-planning and co-teaching sessions with teachers. That way, we all get smarter without making coaches serve as evaluators themselves.

We also have to remember that coaching will never be a silver bullet. It is an important lever for school improvement, one that fits snuggly within a larger and more strategic vision for teacher and student learning. We find that when little attention or planning is applied to the implementation of coaching, then the results are lackluster. The most powerful examples of coaching are when the principal and coach are able to develop a thoughtful plan around how coaching will fit in with everything else that is going on within a school and district.

Guiding Questions:

1. How do you see coaching and teacher evaluation working together?
2. What do you think should be avoided when it comes to coaching and teacher evaluation? Why?
3. What strategies have you used to build teacher leaders in your school? How is this building capacity?
4. What does it look like when you are planning professional development with your school leader?
5. What new strategies are you interested in trying in order to make PD more strategic and data-driven?

Chapter 8: Engaging the Adult Learner

Lessons from the Field:

Winston Churchill once said, "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." We've found that when it comes to coaching, optimism rules. We are literally in the position—one a daily basis—of helping teachers believe that they can (and will) meet their goals. We build this belief system on a powerful foundation of relationships and trust.

Lately, our team has been analyzing a lot of coaching videos and it seems that many coaches get in the way of their own success. The most common pattern is coaches often talk too much, listen too little, and fail to focus the conversation towards student outcomes. Simply put, when it comes to adult learners, we have to understand how to connect. How can I connect with a variety of people, and how can I do it in a way that is productive and outcomes-based?

Guiding Questions:

1. How do you connect with a broad array of people?
2. If you videotaped a coaching conversation of yourself, what would you expect to see? What might be some areas to practice and grow?
3. How do you frame your work through a positive lens? What is the impact of doing so?
4. How do you build relationships and still move towards student outcomes?

Chapter 9: Developing Systems and Structures to Support Coaches

Lessons from the Field:

Coaching is harder than it looks. While it may be easy to launch coaching cycles; it is much more difficult to coach systematically throughout a school. Persistent challenges like reluctant teachers, competing demands, scheduling snafus, faculty size, and gaps in instructional expertise will always be present. For this reason, we advocate for creating a community of learning for coaches wherein we analyze challenges and collaboratively work toward solutions, observe one another to reflect and gather insights, share logs, artifacts, and templates, and study adult learning. Our golden rule is if it looks easy, than something is wrong. Coaching is never easy.

Guiding Questions:

1. What are some areas where you have felt supported as a coach? Why?
2. What do you need in the way of support for your coaching work?
3. Have you ever tried Coaching Labs? If so, what went well and what challenges did you encounter?