



#4 in the Ed Direction School Turnaround Model Series

Collaborative Coaching

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Every four years, the Olympics draw the eyes of millions to the top performing athletes in the world. Behind every one of those athletes is at least one coach who helped each athlete reach performance goals and sustain Olympic level skills.

Professional coaching is also becoming the norm in many industries outside of athletics. For example, executives in Fortune 500 companies, health care professionals, and performing artists all utilize professional coaching services to increase their personal success. Atul Gwande recently noted in *The New Yorker*, “No matter how well trained people are, few can sustain their best performance on their own. That’s where coaching comes in.”ⁱ

The field of education has taken notice and is placing value on the role that coaching plays in developing the skills of veteran and new educators alike. This white paper is the fourth in our research series on evidence-based practices for School Turnaround and improvement. In our experience, high-quality collaborative coaching can have a significant impact for teachers, schools, and whole districts.

Deliberate Practice

In a profession where individuals share a common desire to improve their practice in order to boost student learning, it isn’t surprising that many teachers are searching for ways to improve their craft. Just as professional athletes and musicians grow when a coach objectively assesses the effectiveness of their performance, so do teachers. Instructional coaches provide another set of eyes and ears, guiding educators to discover and implement the changes they need to make in order to reach their full potential. Instructional coaching enables professional learning that is job-embedded and designed in direct response to individual teachers’ needs.

Author Malcolm Gladwell suggests that it takes 10,000 hours of deliberate practice to achieve mastery in any field.ⁱⁱ Practice can be made particularly deliberate when it is guided by coaches and trainers. Education researchers Joyce and Showers conclude: “Like athletes, teachers will put newly learned skills to use—if they are coached.”ⁱⁱⁱ

This idea has immediate relevance in K-12 school turnaround. With over two decades studying professional learning and instructional coaching, researcher Jim Knight confirms that high-quality coaching is critical to school improvement:

Fundamentally, instructional coaches (ICs) partner with teachers to help them incorporate research-based instructional practices into their teaching. They are skilled relationship builders who have a repertoire of communication skills that enable them to empathize, listen, and build trusting relationships. ICs also encourage and support teachers’ reflection about their classroom practices. Thus, they must be skilled at unpacking collaborating teachers’ professional goals so that they can help them create a plan for realizing those goals, all with a focus on improving instruction.^{iv}

Deliberate practice is only relevant and impactful if the collaborators have a shared understanding of what success looks and sounds like. Setting relevant goals and working together requires a knowledge and understanding that is best achieved when coaches are involved in the day-to-day operations of schools, with the understanding that they work with educational professionals as partners.

How do schools and teachers go about implementing coaching? In athletics, coaching is tailored to the sport and the athlete. In education, coaching is tailored to the educator and his/her job—in other words, a district leader will benefit from different coaching than a teacher will. But the

underlying commonality is that both need collaborative coaching to become more effective at implementing best practices in their individual work environments. Coaching must be relevant to daily tasks, and supportive of growth processes.

The Impact of Coaching

The impact of highly-skilled teachers on student learning is well documented. In a large-scale review of thousands of studies related to factors that impact student learning, Hattie and colleagues documented 138 influences that are related to learning outcomes.^v When these influences are ranked based upon their influence, teacher effectiveness is at the top of the list. Other research about student learning, notes that “the single most dominating factor affecting student academic gains is teacher effect.”^{vi}

Instructional coaching increases the skills and outcomes of teachers. When coaching is focused on evidence-based instructional practices, it boosts teachers’ ability to impact students by: 1) facilitating higher levels of engagement and 2) developing learners who are more conscientious and growth oriented.^{vii} In his 2008 review of coaching as professional development, Driscoll notes that coaches act as change agents in driving student improvement in schools.^{viii}

Collaborative Coaching Mindsets

There are a variety of models for instructional coaching, including new teacher mentoring, peer coaching, cognitive coaching, subject-specific coaching, program-specific coaching, and reform-oriented coaching. Our experience with each of these models reveals that the overall effectiveness of any model hinges on the strength of the collaborative relationship, consistency and clarity of feedback, and depth of instructional focus.

Ed Direction implements Collaborative Coaching, which can be distinguished from other types of coaching in that coaches enter relationships with teachers believing that the knowledge and expertise of teachers is as important as the knowledge and expertise of the coach. Instead of creating an expertise hierarchy, we harness our experience and capabilities in support of the teacher. It’s the collaborative work—learning and doing together—that infuses positivity into the process and boosts overall outcomes.

Essential to the work of Collaborative Coaching are five Collaborative Mindsets, defined in the following ways:

- **Equal partners:** All professional educators are recognized and treated as equal partners in the learning relationship. The mindset is: “I can learn from you and teach you.”
- **Growing together:** Skill acquisition is designed to develop expertise in evidence-based practices. The mindset is: “All of us can improve through collaborative learning.”
- **Shared choice:** Decisions are made collaboratively with professional educators. The mindset is: “We have true choices to make in our work together.”
- **Public practice:** Teaching and learning are implemented transparently so that feedback is targeted to the current level of proficiency. The mindset is: “If we want to get better, we have to let other professionals see and hear our work.”
- **Co-reflection:** During each stage in the coaching cycle, collaborators reflect on their own practice and the collaborative relationship. The mindset is: “Each of us has a responsibility to engage in the work and learn from the partnership.”

The Ed Direction Coaching Model

As shown in Figure 1, our Ed Direction Collaborative Coaching Model has four action-oriented stages:

1. **Goal setting** that is collaborative and focused on measurable outcomes
2. **Learning together** to build the confidence and expertise needed for implementation
3. **Practicing** that is both non-threatening and transparent (i.e. seen and heard by others)
4. **Two-way Feedback and Reflection** leading to new goals or increased opportunities to reach current goals through practice and support

Goal Setting

The first stage in the Collaborative Coaching cycle calls for all teachers to set growth goals using quality information such as observation data, student performance data, and professional judgement, including self-assessment. The instructional coach works alongside the teacher to ensure that goals are SMART (specific, measurable, action-oriented, relevant, and time-bound) and

focused on a specific instructional or collaborative skill that is evidence-based, valued by professional educators, and aligned with the school's overall priorities.

Learning Together

Recognizing that professional learning is a crucial part of the culture of schools in transformation, stage two in Collaborative Coaching requires individual teachers and teams of teachers to seek out ways to support their own learning and the learning of others. Professional learning can be facilitated by the instructional coach and should always be focused on evidence-based practices that align with the school's overarching priorities. Skill-building activities are structured to provide clear rationale and examples of the targeted skill so that teachers can understand its applicability and see it in action before they practice it.

Practicing

Viewed as a non-negotiable component of effective professional learning,^{ix} the opportunity to practice strategies in professional learning and classroom



FIGURE 1: ED DIRECTION COLLABORATIVE COACHING MODEL

Collaborative Coaching

settings is key to the third stage of Collaborative Coaching. During this stage, teachers maximize opportunities for actionable feedback from their coach by practicing openly and often. Both the teacher and the coach make sure implementation is an evidentiary process, routinely collecting data and reviewing progress toward the identified goals.

Two-Way Feedback and Reflection

Stage four of the Collaborative Coaching process calls on teachers and coaches to create a culture of continuous improvement and growth. Teachers debrief successes, discuss areas for improvement with their coach, and reflect on progress toward their goals. At this stage, teachers and their coaches collaboratively define next steps, such as: determining a new goal, revising the current goal and returning to learning together and practice stages, or maintaining the current goal and returning to the practice stage.

Key Components of Success

For the stages of Collaborative Coaching to be fully implemented and thus have the intended impact, a **collaborative culture** must be in place. Such a culture validates the importance of each role: teacher, teacher teams (i.e. Professional Learning Communities or Collaborative Teacher Teams), coaches, school leaders, and other supports such as district or charter leadership.

The vision for Collaborative Coaching and value of investing in coaching must be clearly defined and shared by stakeholders. While each system will define its own reason for engaging in instructional coaching, most of our partner schools believe that student learning is enhanced as teaching is improved, and that effective Collaborative Coaching will improve teaching via deliberate practice.

Part of setting a vision for Collaborative Coaching requires defining the professional culture as one of **transparency**, a task in which school leaders play a role. A culture of transparent practices can powerfully support an integration of Collaborative Coaching across all facets of teaching and learning. Simply buying books and expecting spontaneous improvement is not enough to build a culture of Collaborative Coaching. Rather, it is the **district and school leader's** responsibility to practice, model, and teach the skills needed for effective implementation. These include developing the necessary collaborative mindsets and skills needed to navigate the four stages of Collaborative Coaching.

District and school leaders must have **clear expectations** that participating in Collaborative Coaching is beneficial to everyone, regardless of their years of experience. Effective leaders of Collaborative Coaching evaluate what **resources** are needed and ensure that they are available. The coaches themselves are obvious resources; however, time is another essential resource that must be considered. Teachers will need time to prepare for and engage in the coaching conversations as well as time to debrief with coaches following instruction.

The most powerful lever we have to improve learning outcomes for students is classroom instruction. It's not enough for leaders to commit to and communicate a vision of a culture of collaboration; rather, teachers and teacher teams must also own their responsibility to foster a collaborative school culture that values ongoing growth for adults as well as for students.

The most effective cultures of collaboration that we encounter have these aspects in common: an ongoing, intentional effort to develop collaborative mindsets, commitment to the stages of Collaborative Coaching, and the resources necessary to make it all happen.

Conclusion

As a world class gymnast, Simone Biles is perhaps one of best of all time. Her performances are spellbinding, and her ability to defy gravity has secured for her more world championship wins than any other female gymnast in history. Like many other famous athletes Biles has gone through many stages in her progression. In fact, early in her gymnastics career, Biles once made so many blunders in a competition that she received a 0.0 from the judges. Though her talent is obvious, it has taken a collaborative partnership with her coach Aimee Boorman for Biles to reach and maintain her world championship abilities. The results of their 12-year collaborative partnership are quite impressive.

District and school leaders should work to develop world class teachers. By implementing a systematic approach—such as Collaborative Coaching—and making it a priority for all schools and teachers, district leaders are sending the message that ALL teachers are capable of growth and worth the investment. Developing a school wherein all students and teachers perform at high levels is not a solo act. James Kouzes and Barry Posner, leaders in the field of systematic improvement in organizations, sum up the rationale for strong collaboration:

In the thousands of cases we've studied, we've yet to encounter a single example of extraordinary achievement that didn't involve the active participation and support of many people. We've yet to find a single instance in which one talented person—leader or individual contributor—accounted for most, let alone 100% of the success. Throughout the years, leaders from all professions, from all economic sectors, and from around the globe continue to tell us, "you can't do it alone." Leadership is not a solo act; it's a team performance. . . . The winning strategies will be based upon the "we"

not the "I" philosophy. Collaboration is a social imperative. Without it, people can't get extraordinary things done in organizations. ^x

Leaders that focus on cultivating “we philosophy” will actively support teachers in improving their practice through instructional coaching. Better teaching leads will set the stage for stronger student learning, and improvements in both areas are at the heart of the extraordinary work of school transformation. Collaborative Coaching helps schools focus on instruction and constructive dialogue, set improvement efforts on a path to success that maximizes the current strengths of a school staff, build expertise, and foster stronger partnerships of trust.

The Ed Direction School Turnaround Model Series

In case you're just tuning into this series, we invite you to read through the other five white papers. As you can see, this paper is number four of six, and the whole series is listed below:

1. [The School Turnaround Success Model](#)
2. [Teaching Optimization](#)
3. [Leadership in School Turnaround](#)
4. [Collaborative Coaching](#) (this paper)
5. [Parent Engagement in Student Success](#)
6. [Implementation Science](#)

About the Authors

Dr. Hollie Petterson partners with state, district, and school leaders to implement systems of support for effective instruction. Dr. Petterson has over 23 years of experience in public education. She has served as an elementary, middle, and high school classroom teacher, school psychologist, school and district administrator, and state professional development specialist. She loves engaging in Collaborative Coaching and finds learning from other professional educators to be incredibly rewarding.

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has experience in K-12 public education as a Teacher, Reading Specialist, and Program Director. This experience gives her a unique perspective when working with schools and districts across the country. Allison chaired Harvard Graduate School of Education's Language and Literacy student organization and serves as a member of the Read Today Advisory Board.

Marci Houseman helps education leaders and teachers leverage evidence-based practices, data inquiry, and collaborative structures to improve student outcomes. She has extensive experience as a teacher, principal, and professional learning provider. As a graduate of the Sandhills Leadership Academy, Marci's leadership focuses on a collaborative approach to school turnaround and transformation.

Ed Direction (www.eddirection.com) is a premier provider of school turnaround services. By partnering and collaborating with existing school and district staff, we maximize student achievement. We also provide personalized support with evidence-based practices to increase student success.

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ⁱ Gawande, A. (2011). *Personal Best*. New York: *The New Yorker*.
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/10/03/personal-best> (accessed Oct. 3, 2016).

ⁱⁱ Gladwell, M. (2011). *Outliers: The Story of Success*. Back Bay Books.

ⁱⁱⁱ Joyce, B. & Showers, B. (1982). "The Coaching of Teaching." *Educational Leadership* (page 5).

http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el_198210_joyce.pdf (October 17, 2016).

^{iv} Knight, J. (2011). *Unmistakable impact. A partnership approach for dramatically improving instruction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin (page 91).

^v Hattie, J. (2008). *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*. Routledge.

^{vi} Sanders, W., & Rivers, J. (1996). *Cumulative and residual effects of teachers on 149 future student academic achievement*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee (page 6).

^{vii} Bruner, J. (1996). *The Culture of Education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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^{viii} Driscoll, Mark J. in *Principal Leadership, Embracing Coaching as Professional Development*,

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^{ix} Joyce, B. & Showers, B. (1980). "Improving In-service Training: The Messages of Research." *Educational Leadership*, 379–85.
http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el_198002_joyce.pdf (October 16, 2016).

^x Kouzes, J. M. & Posner, B. Z. (2012). *The Leadership Challenge: How to make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*, 5th Edition, Jossey-Bass.