
Post-Conference Strategies

Source: Silicon Valley Mathematics Initiative – David Foster

Tools: Successful Coaching/Teaching and Learning

STRATEGY

The post-conference is the most important time in the coaching sessions. The pre-conference sets the stage and helps to focus and improve a lesson. The class session is mostly a data collection experience for the coach. During the post-conference, the coach shares information, provides feedback, encourages the teacher to reflect on the lesson in order to build the teacher's capacity. The post-conference is also an excellent opportunity to examine student thinking and work. Conversations around students' understandings and products generate ideas and issues of strategies and next steps the teacher should take. Focusing questions to ensure all students are making progress is a key technique of an effective coach. The post-conference provides an opportunity to assess learning, inform instruction and adjust educational plans. Effective coaches are able to focus on the connection between the intended content and student learning through effective questioning. Teacher moves and "what if" scenarios are often raised by the teacher during the post-conference.

Focusing on students' thinking/work

The focus of pedagogical content coaching is on students' thinking and on their work products. When the focus is on student thinking and performance, teachers see how their role as a teacher must adapt. When teachers examine student thinking that includes the student's understandings and misconceptions of math concepts, they can then develop strategies to address those needs. This is fundamental to good teaching. Student work is therefore at the center of what happens during coaching. It is a tool for evaluating the effectiveness of changes in curriculum, instruction and pedagogy.

A coach can use many different forms of student thinking and work to enhance the post-conference discussion. Silicon Valley Math pedagogical content coaches tend to use three sources of data for examining student thinking: 1) classroom observations; 2) student work products; and 3) formal assessments. As a classroom observer, the coach can note the approach, thinking and discussions of the students. As part of the post-conference, the coach may report the findings of the thinking of the students. This is valuable to the teacher for several reasons. It increases the teacher's knowledge of his/her students. Even with a small class size, a teacher can't hear or see all students' thinking. Data that is collected about student thinking can then be used to inform instruction and tailor future lessons. The second value is to open a discussion about the mathematics that students are learning and where gaps or misconceptions might be forming. It provides a basis for discussions and reflections on the ongoing learning of each student in the classroom.

Another form of using student work is to examine student products completed during an observed class period. By collectively examining the student work, the teacher and coach can engage in a discussion rich with evidence. Mathematical understandings and the development of skills of selected students can be explored. Assessments of student growth or understandings can be shared. Talk of next steps and how to address a certain educational issue is a natural outgrowth of this kind of discussion.

Student thinking and understanding are also evident in formal assessments. Pedagogical content coaches work closely with their teachers to plan assessment tasks that are closely aligned to the students' goals and instructional experiences. Examination of collaboratively produced assessments provides a powerful way to evaluate the progress of instruction. These periodic assessments not only inform student achievement records, but more importantly they can inform the instructional program and strategies used by the teacher. Using the formal assessment instrument as a learning tool for students is also important. The coach and teacher can discuss ways to leverage the assessment to promote student learning.

POST-CONFERENCE PROMPTS

Tell me about today's lesson

- What parts of the lesson were most successful?
- Where did students experience difficulty?
- Why don't you tell me about ...
- What evidence do you have?
- Let's talk about (something that occurred in the lesson.)
- Give me an idea why ...

Looking at student work

- What do you think ___ understands about ___?
- What misunderstandings do you think ___ is showing?
- Why do you think ___ did that?
- What would it look like if the student could demonstrate the skill?
- How do you know if ___ has mastered this skill?
- Let's brainstorm what you could do to push ___'s understanding to the next level.

Planning Next Lesson

What do you want to do in the next lesson?

- What pieces of evidence will help you plan for the next lesson?