Coaching Journal

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**Coaching Session 1: 2-7-18**

**Strategies**

The first session was during one of our monthly faculty meetings. I was seated next to a new employee and during a break we began discussing her onboarding process. During our discussion, it came to light that she was missing knowledge of a number of strategies that would help her be a successful teacher in our school environment. I inquired with my grade level lead and mentor about becoming the instructional coach for Mrs. Atwater. After receiving clearance, I discussed this opportunity with Mrs. Atwater and we began discussing her needs and the priority for each. She discussed her proficiency with the Microsoft Office Suite, but expressed her deficits in knowledge with working in our Learning Management System. She also completed surveys documenting her technology proficiency and her willingness to learn additional strategies. By noting her verbal and non-verbal communication, she appeared overwhelmed, but more than willing to learn. In an effort to calm her nerves regarding not knowing school expectations, I immediately began to show her how to complete our D.E.A.R. process and how to set up her Google Voice phone. D.E.A.R. at our school means Drop Everything And Roster. The D.E.A.R. process is a part of our school processes and culture. During D.E.A.R., she should check her roster for new students. I explained the importance of completing this process every day. I modeled how to drop and skip lessons and assignments. These are lessons and assignments that students have missed and will not have time to make up.

I explained to Mrs. Atwater that if she does not complete this step, students may repeat work that they have already mastered and/or feel overwhelmed with the amount or work they need to complete by the end of the semester. She took notes as I explained the steps. I then watched as Mrs. Atwater follow her notes and complete the processes herself. I also showed her how to send students and families a welcome email and set up a time to call the students and families to complete their onboarding process. So that Mrs. Atwater can call students and retain a degree of work-life separation, she also needed to set up her Google Voice number and connect it with her mobile phone. This Google Voice number is a lifeline to connect her with families and students. I explained to her that when students have problems or parents have questions or concerns they will call her on this number. I also showed her how to customize the settings in Google Voice so that she will not receive calls during her personal time.

**Skills and Effective Changes**

Mrs. Atwater was very excited about learning the new skills and a little daunted by the thought of what else she needed to learn to be an effective teacher in our environment. Continuing to build our emotional connection, I explained to her that I also started working at our school after the beginning of the school year and that on top of starting late, my learning teammate left school for maternity leave and only gave me a few hours of training before leaving. I explained to Mrs. Atwater though that she has an awesome learning teammate who will has automated and organized some of her processes already for her. I also explained to her that everyone has a tough time in our environment during the first year, but that she would find her rhythm and that her feelings of anxiety would resolve as she learned the systems. We discussed the next time we would meet and she was excited about learning more.

**Reflection on Challenges and Solution**

Even though I know that Mrs. Atwater is new to this environment, she is an experienced teacher. “Respect, equality, and openness” are essential to making sure that I do not overstep my boundary as a coach and make her feel as though she does not know what she is doing. I follow-up with her to ensure that she understands the D.E.A.R. process. During our follow-up, I realized that I had not explained to her how to log her calls with students and their families. I sent her screenshots of how to log the welcome calls in our LMS. Mrs. Atwater quickly learned the process and complete the steps. I verified the completion of her communication log via the LMS communication logging system.

**Coaching Session 2: 2-13-18**

**Strategies**

Mrs. Atwater has made progress in feeling more confident in our virtual environment. We decided to meet after school hours to continue working together to fill in the gaps of her technological skills. In our session, we decided to cover the process of entering temporary zeros. Temporary zeros are entered into students’ gradebooks for assignments that are two weeks late in completion. This process is mandated by our administration and is completed by teachers twice a month. If a student has a 504 or IEP that exempts them from receiving the temporary zeros twice a month, then they only receive the temporary zeros once a month. Entering temporary zeros is an attempt to bring to the students and caretakers attention the fact that the student is falling behind where they should be in class. At this point, a student can still complete the assignments for complete credit but his/her grade is temporarily reduced when the temporary zeros are added to the gradebook.

To complete this process, Mrs. Atwater needed her course calendar, list of IEP students’ accommodations, and access to the LMS. Mrs. Atwater and I met in Google Hangouts for this coaching session. I shared my screen with her and together we identified the list assignments for which the relevant students would receive temporary zeros for uncompleted work. I showed her how to access the LMS Assignment screen and how to assign temporary zeros for an assignment. Mrs. Atwater then used her notes and shared her screen with me to while completing the process for her students. While she updated the gradebooks, I advised Mrs. Atwater to check her IEP list to ensure that she was not applying the temporary zeros to students who have modifications exempting them from this week’s entries. I provided Mrs. Atwater with the template of a temporary zero entry notification letter and instructed Mrs. Atwater how to send individual and group emails to students/parents. The letter informs students/parents of the entry of temporary zeros to the gradebook and explains how students can work to improve their grades. I emphasized to Mrs. Atwater how important communication is with our students and our parents when changes are made, especially in the virtual environment, since we do not meet with our students daily or in-person. Mrs. Atwater appreciated the information I provided and asked follow-up questions regarding the process. We agreed to meet informally during the work week via Google hangouts as needed.

**Skill and Affective Changes**

Mrs. Atwater has been very quick to learn and apply the processes that are expected in our school. As the next temporary zero date approached, I sent her a Google Hangouts message to contact her and reminder her. I did not hear a response from her, but because in our environment we are sometimes called into meetings or are on phone calls with students and or parents and cannot respond when we are pinged via Google Hangouts. On the following workday, I followed up with Mrs. Atwater and asked her if she had any problems entering the temporary zeros. She expressed her dismay that she had forgotten to enter the temporary zeros, because she was working with a student when I sent the Google Hangouts message. I explained to her that working with the student was the priority and that we all make mistakes and forget tasks from time to time. I encouraged her to access the Google Calendar, create a reoccurring Temporary Zero event and add some reminders. She was relieved when I told her that we all have forgotten to add the temporary zeros at one point or another. Mrs. Atwater was already familiar with adding events to the Google Calendar and quickly added the repeating Temporary Zero Event to the Google Calendar with reminders. She then completed the Temporary Zero process and did not have additional questions.

**Reflection on Challenges and Solution**

In recognizing the possible interferences of and my inability to monitor her non-verbal cues, because our session would be held virtually, I was nervous about this session. I was very pleased and felt very confident however, after our Google Hangout session. Even though it was a held at the end of the school day, I was energized to teach Mrs. Atwater a new process and she was excited about learning something new as well. I was glad that Mrs. Atwater felt comfortable in sharing with me that she had not completed the next temporary zero assignment. To me is displayed the fact that she knew I would not judge her and would help her in her journey. I was more upset with myself, because I had not anticipated that, as a first-year teacher in our environment, she would need additional reminders to complete this task on-time and be consistent with the rest of the staff. Mrs. Atwater’s willingness to bounce back quickly and implement the strategies that would assist her with time management and quickly completing the forgotten assignment has been encouraging to me as a coach. I know that coaching is a reciprocal process, but I am surprisingly finding out how much I am learning from Mrs. Atwater during our authentic and meaningful conversations.

**Coaching Session 3: 3-13-18**

**Strategies**

I met with Mrs. Atwater via Google Hangouts for this session on the GoFar assessment. We were mandated by our administrators to have our students complete a GoFar assessment as a benchmark. There have been grumblings amongst the staff regarding the change from USA TestPrep for our benchmarks to the GoFar system in the Student Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) and I could sense that Mrs. Atwater shared in the misgivings about this assessment. In reflecting on the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Development; “Data also are useful to monitor and assess progress against established benchmarks,” I made sure I began this session by “walking on solid ground.” The benefit of having students complete the GoFar assessment is that it will provide a formative assessment of what the students have learned so far in the course. The questions on the assessment will cover all the standards in the course. There are two significant benefits that I highlight to Mrs. Atwater for creating and having her students complete this assessment. The first benefit is that Mrs. Atwater has choice on which questions are selected for the course standards. There are multiple questions in the GoFar System for each standard. The next benefit, I explain is that the results will provide data about which standards the students have not mastered. Because our students can work at their own pace without permanent penalty, some students will complete assignments slower than or ahead of the course calendar pace. The results from the GoFar assessment will provided direction for targeted remediation for her students and may also help identify students who need intensive supports moving forward.

Materials needed for this session are a list of the course standards, directions to creating the GoFar benchmark, and access to the SLDS system. One of the lead teachers in our school has already created and instruction manual for how to create a benchmark. Instead of recreating the manual, we use it to guide our session. I share my screen with Mrs. Atwater and go through the steps of creating a sample GoFar benchmark pausing to answer questions. After Mrs. Atwater, watches me create the sample she begins to create her benchmark. There were several glitches that occurred while Mrs. Atwater created her benchmark. The system logged her out multiple times and she became frustrated. She wanted to stop at that point. It was difficult for me not to express my own frustration with the glitches with the system, but I encouraged her to save her work and continue after a break. I explained that I along with other teachers experienced similar glitches when we created our benchmarks. We scheduled another meeting to continue creating her GoFar benchmark. During our next meeting she does not stop until she has finished with her assessment. Towards the end of the session, Mrs. Atwater shares her screen with me for me to review her assessment. After my review and her updates, she saves the assessment and then forwards it with her department chair for review. I congratulate her for finishing the task and for pushing through even though we encountered glitches in the system while she worked. We agreed to follow-up with a brief meeting after her assessment is approved by the department chair.

**Skills and Affective Changes**

Mrs. Atwater is very open about learning new strategies and using technology to enhance students’ mastery of content. In this situation, however, Mrs. Atwater is exposed to negative commentary about a strategy that has been mandated by the administration prior to her implementation of the strategy. As stated by Orr, “Firm attitudes are developed through communication exchanges about the innovation with peers and opinion leaders.” This is not the best environment for a coach to encourage change. As an experienced teacher, Mrs. Atwater had preconceived notions about why we were creating the benchmark in the GoFar system and was not a hundred percent on board with creating the assessment. As indicated by Knight (2007), “What we see, hear, and perceive is dramatically shaped by our prior knowledge.” Before we began creating the GoFar I addressed the ‘elephant in the room’ by establishing her purpose for creating the assessment. Once we began creating the assessment her frustration with the glitches in the system were warranted and I addressed the validity of her feelings. Making sure that she took a break from this frustrating task, but also encouraging her to schedule a follow-up meeting gave a chance for Mrs. Atwater and I to reset and reconvene to finish the task. I made sure that I congratulated her to engender positivity in reference to successfully completing a frustrating task. After testing her students, I helped Mrs. Atwater locate the data for her students. She later used the GoFar results to identify specific students that needed support and standards that required reteaching. Mrs. Atwater expressed her appreciation for my encouragement and could now see the benefit of the GoFar assessment.

**Reflection on Challenges and Solution**

After having so many positive experiences with Mrs. Atwater it surprised me that she did not display the optimistic attitude with regards to implementing this change in assessment. The change in attitude could have been a holdover from her previous job where administrators mandated changes with no regard to teacher preference, experience or opinion. Her attitude could also have been related to Mrs. Atwater hearing her colleagues express discontent with changing our benchmark. I believed that I was being proactive by explaining why this GoFar assessment would help her with assessment data and providing targeted remediation for her students. I realized as she began working on the assessment that I needed to quickly think of another strategy. I am not certain that if I informed her about the glitches ahead of time if it would have made her even more anxious to begin creating her GoFar assessment or not. I was grateful that she was willing to schedule a follow-up session to complete the assessment and it did provide the break that she needed to come back and tackle the task.

I have always enjoyed teaching people how to do new things and learn new strategies. I did not realize that I was truly working in my passion until I began working with Mrs. Atwater. She was a great individual to work with as I learn how to become an effective instructional coach. I learned that having the initial conversation with a person can be very revealing in their desire to learn and reflective of how they will receive strategies that they are approached with implementing. I often learned more from our follow-up sessions than I did from the initial session. To rephrase Knight (2007), when we authentically see our collaborating teachers as equal partners, we open ourselves to learn from others. This process helped me find the gaps in my instructional coaching practice. It also helped me understand that I cannot predict where my peers will experience problems or frustrations. I have to be willing to change my plan according to the situation. I also learned the importance of the partner dialogue, empathy, following-up after initial sessions, being willing to change my plan and having multiple strategies for helping colleagues become more effective. These are all strategies, tactics or tools that I will need to keep in my instructional coach toolbox.

**References**

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