Coaching Journal

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A needs assessment was implemented on September 24, 2013 to the candidate being coached to determine the teacher’s needs within the classroom in relation to technology integration. The teacher indicated that she had minimal confidence in her ability to utilize technology and integrate it into curriculum. Sessions were scheduled to give the candidate time to progressively improve her confidence and skills in relation to technology.

The first session of coaching took place on October 2, 2013 from 2:45-3:45PM. This session included an overview on the Productivity tools available through Microsoft Office. Jim Knight’s text, Instructional Coaching, expresses the importance of instructional coaches engaging in effective listening techniques (2007). Listening empathetically to what others have to say, effective instructional coaches base their actions off of the needs and concerns of the individuals they coach, much like effective teachers base their lessons off of their students’ needs. The session was driven by the needs of the colleague being coached, who indicated that she did not understand how fully maneuver and work the “tables” feature in Microsoft Word. She was introduced to the main features of the toolbar at the top of Microsoft Word, and learned how to work the *design* and *layout* options. One feature she was excited to learn about was how to distribute rows and columns evenly. It was something she had sought out in the past but never had independently mastered. The teacher then learned how to insert images from the web as well as through Microsoft Office’s clipart gallery and how to wrap text around images accordingly. In the past, she had difficulty formatting pages with pictures. The coach modeled how to complete the tasks and then allowed for independent practice for the individual being coach. While the coach modeled tasks, the teacher being coached took notes to ensure she was able to complete the tasks when there was no support to guide her. Another visual feature she asked for clarification on was the shape feature of Microsoft Office products. She was introduced to editing shapes to include creative fills and how to manipulate a line’s thickness. It was noted that the teacher being coached needed ample time to let new skills soak in. While she appeared to understand concepts when modeled, it was difficult for her to independently apply skills. This took a lot of patience and time on the coach’s part. Just like children need time and patience in the classroom, adult learners need the same. While it was planned to review aspects of SmartNotebook, there was no time in the one hour time block for this to occur.

The colleague being coached expressed interest in the features in Microsoft Office, and wanted to spend time mastering the skills as opposed to briefly reviewing them and possibly forgetting them later on. The skill and changes of the colleague were witnessed during the coaching session because the teacher expressed gratitude and understanding when she realized how to do something she had not been able to figure out in the past, namely mastering the tables feature in Microsoft Office. She expressed her excitement in creating a rubric that is formatted correctly, and not have to wonder what to do when she wanted to The teacher often contributes to the first grade team as far as documents and assessments are concerned, so refining her skills will not only affect her, but the entire grade level as well.

The second session of coaching took place on October 9, 2013 from 3:00-4:00PM. While the initial plan for the session was to provide higher-order thinking opportunities for students in primary grade levels, the session had to be modified based on the results of the previous session. The colleague being coached indicated a need for clarification on the Smart Notebook software and how to successfully utilize the tools.

The coaching session began with basic needs that the candidate indicated she had when the topic of the SmartBoard came up. She used Smart Notebook files that other teachers shared with her in the past, but she never went further than using it as a blank white board or projection surface. The coach discussed the higher-order thinking opportunities available for students when using the SmartBoard, and gave the teacher opportunities to share ways that she could use the SmartBoard to increase the rigor of lessons. This allowed some of her expertise to shine and increased personal confidence in finding ways to increase technology use in the classroom. The session continued as the coach modeled how to utilize basic features of the Smart Notebook software, such as the variety of choices for the user when locking items, as well as cloning and infinitely cloning objects. Since the colleague had experience with using, but not creating, files on Smart Notebook, she caught on very quickly. The familiarity helped her put practice into place. This session was not as much focused on the instructional coach *explaining* or *modeling* strategies to the colleague being coached, but observing as the candidate explored uses for the program utilizing skills obtained (Knight, 2007).

The Activity Toolkit was introduced at the end of the session, and this was a learning experience for the coach. The coach had only utilized this feature a few times, and was not incredibly proficient in its functions. Therefore, some problems occurred when certain features were explored. Fortunately, the issues that arose were not necessarily important in the overall function of the activity being explained. It was evident, however, that the coach was not a perfect expert and the coach as well as the teacher being coached were able to problem solve together. It helped the teacher being coached feel more comfortable as she expressed that she was relieved that even coaches get confused with technology. Her confidence and attitude towards technology appeared to increase after this session. There was an opportunity to troubleshoot basic features and roadblocks that once stood in the way of her attitude and confidence appeared to decrease.

Jim Knight (2007) stated that instructional coaches can “foster high-quality implementation of best practices” (p.109). This can be done through the use of the components of modeling, observing, exploring, supporting, and reflecting. This particular coaching session showed the coach supporting the teacher, and then exploring together. It helped solidify the professional relationship and added another layer of mutual respect. Once the coach noticed that the teacher had mastered a teaching practice, the coach chose to move on to another topic. Several strategies were used to foster conversations and learning opportunities.

The third coaching session occurred on October 16, 2013 and was one that the teacher being coached was obviously excited about. She expressed throughout the 2013-2014 school year that she was looking for ways to have students use technology to increase their learning, namely through projects utilizing available resources. The teacher expressed the she was tired of using the computer lab for merely having students practice skills on programs like *Skills Tutor* or *Starfall*. After the first two sessions covered topics that allowed her to move beyond roadblocks that she said made her feel incompetent, she was excited to find out ways that she could use the internet to help her students learn and perform. The session covered Web 2.0 tools that support student content knowledge and the initial coaching plan was to introduce sites like *Kerpoof*, *Wordle*, and *Padlet* to the teacher. The plan for this session was for the coach to explain and model how certain Web 2.0 technologies worked, and then finding a practical application for the tools in the classroom. The struggle the coach had on this session was the fact there are numerous available technologies that would appeal to the first grade teacher. Choosing a few that would be easily introduced and mastered one hour was a difficult decision. To organize the flow of the session, as well as the implementation of concepts learned in the classroom, the coach planned to guide the teacher to use an advance organizer to set up learning activities. Knight (2007) states, “advance organizers provide students with a context for learning, guide students to review prior knowledge, prepare students for activities, and increase enthusiasm for learn” (p.162). It was planned that the teacher and coach would create three advance organizers to help organize learning activities. In reality, only one was created and focused on in depth during the one hour time-frame

The main resource that was discussed in great detail was *Padlet*, first by discussion and then by modeling. As suggested by Knight (2007) the coach used the strategy of “employ the partnership communication skills” (p.127). This involves listening attentively and working on building a connection and frustrating relationship. Effective dialogue occurred during the discussion because the coach truly listened to the ideas that the teacher being coached had to express. There was mutual respect that allowed the coach to explain how *Padlet* is a virtual board with sticky notes that can be easily moved and shared. The teacher being coached expressed her support of the privacy and moderation settings and how they made it easy for students to become members of a teacher’s board. There was a lot of stopping and going during this session, because the teacher needed direct feedback when a question occurred. Due to the one-on-one nature of this session, this was appropriate and did not prove to be problematic. With the coach, the teacher came up with an application for this resource integrating a Social Studies standard that was to soon be taught in her classroom. The teacher developed an advance organizer that incorporated a trip to the computer lab where students utilized *Padlet* to communicate their learning. It included the four components that Knight (2007) professed as important: a lesson overview, an explanation what students were doing during the activities, a teacher review of the content for students to keep in mind to prepare for new learning, and an explanation why the learning activity is important.

Effective teachers integrate technology into their curriculum by not just introducing software and using it once, but referring back to it to help students master grade level standards. The teacher being coached supported the engaging ideas presented at this learning session and was determined to increase her student learning using the tools discussed. The coach received an excellent application idea for *Padlet* through the discussion with the teacher and felt that the teacher’s knowledge and expertise in first grade content helped her come up with a creative use of *Padlet* that the coach had not considered in the past.

On October 24, 2013 a fourth one-hour session occurred that focused on Web 2.0 tools in the classroom. The particular session focused on promoting student creativity through the use of tools like *Prezi, Story Jumper*, and *Animoto*. Due to the fact that the coach was reflective and reviewed the data from the previous session, which indicated that time to dive into one tool took much longer than anticipated, the coach decided to create an information sheet for the teacher being coached to refer to. It included first-grade-friendly Web 2.0 sites that the teacher could explore on her own if she chose to. The teacher indicated she would prefer mastering a small number of resources instead of a quick introduction to many, so this drove the decisions made in the coaching process. The coach had already discussed the benefit of advance organizers and the importance of higher-order thinking opportunities for students when using technology, so time likely permitted for two resources to be introduced during this session. The coach planned to go in depth with one resource, *Animoto*, and give a brief overview of another, *Story Jumper*.

The teacher being coached was fascinated and impressed with the availability of free motivational, educational resources that are available to utilize with students. When introduced to the resource, *Animoto*, the teacher instantly was not receptive to the resource in her classroom. Additionally, a bit of time during the session was spent discussing the importance of understanding the difference between using technologies for creativity and for content reinforcement. This was a challenge for the coach, because while the teacher was receptive to the ideas presented, she brought up some relevant concerns regarding promoting independent creativity in first grade that the coach could not provide answers to. For example, she expressed that most students in her class performed below grade level and benefitted from direct instruction strategies as well as structure to help them guide their learning. She feared that allowing them to be let loose on creative websites was not the best use of their learning time. The coach agreed that a lot of modeling, patience, and structure would need to be in place in order for some of the Web 2.0 tools to be effective in the classroom. Modeling was something that the coach could not do with the students of the colleague being coached, but the coach decided to model for the teacher exactly how the teacher could utilize the program to teach a standard. The coach showed a finished example of work that a first grade class completed while using *Animoto* as a practical application resource. The coach also decided they should plan an advance organizer to help the students navigate the resources step-by-step. This took a bit of time to do, but after the teacher and coach developed a Science lesson on *Animoto* that integrated magnets, they decided it was possible, but would take a lot of work and possibly parent volunteers. Unfortunately, this discussion took a lot of time within the session, and the second resource, *Story Jumper*, was not addressed.

Jim Knight states, “Effective instructional coaches help teachers grow by building on their strengths and helping them achieve potential they may have not realized they have had” (p. 140). While the candidate being coached was initially scared to try a new, interactive resource with her students, she realized it could be done with a patient, methodical process encouraged by the instructional coach. The behavior and reactions from the coach directly affect the content of the session. The same goes for an effective teacher: the behavior and reactions from the teacher have a direct effect on student learning. Growth was made by taking advantage of teaching points and opportunities. While the initial session’s goals and areas of discussion were not met, the teacher learned they could reach their potential, which was a positive change observed. The teacher had some valid points, and was aware of this, which also increased her level of confidence. It was concluded that sometimes objectives of a session in coaching are not met, but learning opportunities still arise that can be even greater then set objectives.

The fifth session occurred on October 30, 2013. Effective coaches are reflective and receptive, and it was concluded from the following session that the teacher did not feel like they had enough resources to effectively implement Web 2.0 technologies in their classroom. The fifth session had an initial plan to go over blogs and other forms of communication with students and parents. This was modified, based on teacher reaction. Knight (2007) believes that choice is an important element in coaching, “taking away choice is a bona fide recipe for resistance” (p.53). The teacher was given a choice to move forward with the coaching on blogs, or to have a brief overview of additional Web 2.0 tools. While the coach believed in thoroughly teaching skills and providing application opportunities, the option to possibly quickly review resources was necessary. The teacher decided that she wanted to be briefly introduced to a new Web 2.0 tools since she was thoroughly trained on how to develop lessons using other tools during previous sessions. She also indicated that if there was time left over at the end of the session she would be interested in learning how to communicate electronically using a blog. While this veered from the original plan, it met the needs of the learner.

The Web 2.0 tools not discussed, but planned to be discussed during the previous sessions were topics of focus. These included: *Wordle, Kerpoof, Prezi*, and *Story Jumper*. These sites were explored and modeled by the coach, then the teacher was given time to navigate on their own. The teacher was able to take notes on the sites and reflect on the discussion with the coach for classroom integration techniques. Many of the creation sites impressed the teacher, but she felt that they would require a lot of time and assistance to effectively use with her students. A change was observed in her interpretation of these tools in comparison to the previous sessions. She was setting higher expectations for her students and noted that time would need to be given to the applications initially. Once students felt comfortable with material, they could be more independent with it. Her attitude seemed to change for the positive regarding these new technologies.

The coach observed some noticable changes in the colleage being coached, as well in oneself. The coach felt more comfortable with the process of coaching, and more confident that time is what is necessary in creating change. Studnets need time to learn to be independent with tasks, just as adults need time to dive into changes. The teacher was a lot more confident in the application of resources as the sessions progressed, and a lot of dialogue focused on application in the classroom. There was minimal need for justification of why certain tools should be used, but more on how they should be used to extend learning. The coach learned some valuable insight from the teacher and refined their communication skills. The coach helped the colleague find the solution they needed to do what mattered to them. The colleague felt comfortable openly communicating what they thought, which helped them learn more effectively.

References

Knight, J. (2007). Instructional coaching: A partnership approach to improving instruction. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.