1 What Do Teachers Believe?

This chapter introduces the first step of the differentiated coaching cycle:

Understanding teacher strengths and beliefs *and*

Focusing on the research-based school vision for learning and school success

Why? **Because practices flow from beliefs. Asking teachers to change practices also asks them to change part of who they are.**

Hannah,[1] an experienced middle school mathematics teacher, wanted to create higher levels of engagement in her classroom. I was coaching her team as part of the school's yearlong commitment to facilitating student discourse to increase student critical-thinking skills, including reasoning and justification. "Powerful small-group work and all-class discussions" summed it up. The goal related to the Common Core mathematical practice of constructing viable arguments and critiquing the reasoning of others—a key mathematical ability no matter the standards you follow—and to language arts standards for argumentation as well.

My initial observations of the team's classrooms showed that about 40 percent of instructional time involved direct instruction, and about 5 percent was devoted to high-level conversations involving reasoning and justification. Both are sound teaching strategies, according to effect size studies[2] (Hattie, 2012), but the teachers believed that increasing discourse would improve student reasoning and justification skills.

Before the first team meeting, Hannah told me,

> I get why we're doing this, but I'm going to have a lot of questions. You've been in my classroom; you've seen me keep everyone engaged

> and learning during direct instruction. Facilitating discourse, quite frankly, seems to leave true learning to chance. When I think of trying to ward off misconceptions, keep concepts in sequence, and provide enough practice, I'm uneasy. You know I don't always use the new curriculum because it simply doesn't introduce concepts in a logical sequence. I will not experiment on my students—the stakes are too high as I ready them for algebra.

Yes, I actually stood in awe of Hannah's ability to direct student learning. And I knew all about the fiasco with the new curriculum. Hannah's "I will not experiment" comment spoke volumes about her thoughtful concerns. Several teachers had collaborated on a list of questions about the curriculum for the district; no one answered. Because student achievement was about the same in all classrooms, the principal had left the choice of the old or new curriculum up to each teacher. But now the district was demanding uniform implementation.

If I hadn't known about Hannah's strengths and beliefs, I might have viewed her as resistant to her team's goals for discourse, as well as to the curriculum. Instead, her concerns made perfect sense in light of the following strengths:

- A deep understanding of the building blocks of mathematical concepts—This is what Hill and Ball (2009) refer to as mathematical knowledge for teaching.
- Clear lesson goals and assessments—Students knew the learning goal of each lesson and what success looked like.
- Classroom management—"It takes about nine weeks of patience to get everyone in compliance with my processes, but it's worth it," Hannah had explained to me. "The rest of the year runs like clockwork."
- Drive to perfect teaching methods—Hannah constantly updated her lesson plans based on student work and formative-assessment results.

"I may stick to what I know how to do," she joked, "but I'm always looking to make it better. I'd like to increase student engagement. So. Discourse. Just know I'll have lots of questions!"

A COLLABORATIVE START

Hannah listened politely as other team members voiced their hopes for discourse: students being able to articulate thinking, make connections with the real world, develop a deeper understanding of concepts, and transfer knowledge from one situation to another. The team began to plan for improving their ability to facilitate discourse.

First, they asked to see it modeled. I shared a film of urban students engaged in a lively conversation regarding an algebra problem. A student displayed his diagram and equation using a document camera, saying, "I think my equation is wrong, but I can't figure out my mistake." The teacher said, "Class, help him out," and his classmates carefully and respectfully shared ideas, with reasoning,

until they all understood the equations that correctly represented the diagram. I added that the math coach who shared the film with me said it took about six weeks of practice for the students to reach that level of discussion.

Then, the teachers decided to launch discourse via small-group work. They agreed to use the same basic lesson but with different content: Students would use a rubric to individually score several samples of student work from a short-answer assessment problem and then discuss and come to a group conclusion as to the proper score for each example. Together, the team brainstormed the set-up, facilitation moves, and methods for gauging reasoning and justification.

Hannah added, "We'll have to reteach the concept being assessed first, or their differing levels of knowledge will hinder discussion. Plus, the sample work has to tie to our current units because this is going to take a lot of time. I mean, if we provide four examples, some of my students will need the whole class period to do the individual scoring before the discussion can start." She sighed.

Hannah tried the lesson, though, and reported that her students engaged with the assignment. "They certainly like finding mistakes!" she commented. But when her team brainstormed their next steps toward effective discourse, she remained silent. She told me that her classes weren't ready for more. Maybe later. Maybe.

Instead of thinking about Hannah's reluctance as resistance, let's look at discourse through the lens of her strengths and beliefs.

A TEACHER'S STRENGTHS AND BELIEFS

Consider two of Hannah's beliefs about education, gathered through interviews and verified through classroom observation, that explain her lack of enthusiasm toward group work.

Hannah's clear talents with direct instruction reinforced a belief that all students benefit from that approach. She preferred to learn in a logical, sequential fashion and had evidence that her students benefited from it as well. She worried that discussions and group work would decrease her control of processes and outcomes.

Hannah believed that groups are less efficient than direct instruction. When we watched the exemplary classroom discussion film, she commented, "I'm impressed but . . . it took forever for the students to pinpoint the mistake and the misunderstanding that led to it. How are we going to find that kind of instructional time?"

Hannah saw basic skills as prerequisites to higher-level thinking. For example, her measure of algebra readiness involved three-digit multiplication. "Students who can't sit still and calculate several three-digit multiplication problems simply aren't going to be interested in finding x," she'd told me.

INEFFECTIVE BELIEFS

Hannah continued with direct instruction, even as her team experimented more and more with discourse, but can you see how Hannah's practices

weren't the result of laziness or bad habits? Instead, her beliefs and strengths, the core of how she saw herself as a teacher, drove her classroom practices. While it's easy to see the connections between strengths and practices in someone else, *all* of us hold to our habits and beliefs. That's why coaching teachers for change is so difficult. I've seen similar patterns with most of the teachers I work with, not just Hannah.

WHERE THOSE INGRAINED HABITS COME FROM

Habits, beliefs, opinions . . . where do they come from? For educators, many are the result of our own school experiences, as was Hannah's affinity for the structured-learning activities that had helped her thrive in school.

Other beliefs come from the environment in which we teach; Hannah told me that her concerns over her students' obvious gaps in core knowledge lessened her willingness to deviate from proven practices.

Sometimes, we can't articulate exactly how we formed such beliefs because they are simply a part of us—"the way things are."

Haidt (2012) summarized research on how we form our beliefs, with many of them arising unconsciously from our experiences, cultural backgrounds, and genetic makeup. Further, we are all subject to confirmation bias; Wason (1960) defined this as a tendency to only seek, note, and interpret evidence that supports or confirms our prior conclusions. Exacerbating this, if we wish to believe something, only supporting evidence makes it through our built-in filters.

In Hannah's case, her experiences and expertise with direct instruction trapped her in her classroom style. Dewey (1932/1985) points out the problem of habit:

> Habit gives facility, and there is always a tendency to rest on our oars, to fall back on what we have already achieved. For that is the easy course; we are at home and feel comfortable in lines of action that run the tracks of habits already established and mastered. Hence, the old, the habitual self, is likely to be treated as if it were *the* self; as if new conditions and new demands were something foreign and hostile. (pp. 306–307)

Yes, asking teachers to change their practices often means asking them to do things that sound absolutely hostile to them. You might even say that Hannah showed common sense by sticking to the known curriculum and what had proven effective in the past, even if discourse held out promise for more engagement and higher-level thinking. What should surprise us is that so many teachers—or people in any other profession—are willing to try innovations.

HABITS AND MENTAL MODELS

These concepts of habitual beliefs parallel writings on mental models, which date back over a hundred years to the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, a

philosopher who, in the 1890s, used the term to describe how our brains seem to construct diagrams, or models, of reality. We use these to consider what is true, to anticipate what might happen, to reason, and to explain what we experience. Senge et al. (2000), Duffy (2003), and others point out that because people are often unaware of how their mental models control their actions, these models can block change—unless we purposely unearth, examine, and challenge them.

Similarly, Costa and Garmston (2015) point out that "although the traditional model of clinical supervision addresses overt teaching behaviors, we believe that these behaviors of teaching are the products and artifacts of inner thought *processes* and intellectual functions" (p. 8). Their cognitive coaching model thus emphasizes metacognition, thinking about one's thinking, to unearth patterns of beliefs and behaviors.

However, *all* of us involved in school change, not just teachers, operate from mental models. We need to examine our own beliefs about why teachers aren't changing. Are we trapped by our own mental models? Do we really understand the magnitude of the changes we are asking teachers to make?

Before designing a professional-development effort, consider these four essential questions:

1. What are the teachers' beliefs about how students learn?
2. How tightly tied are teachers' beliefs to their own strengths as educators?
3. What are the teachers' beliefs about their roles in student success?
4. What else keeps teachers from trying new practices?

IDENTIFYING TEACHER BELIEFS

To design teacher-centered professional development that will further the school's goals, I begin with four essential questions:

(1) *What are the teachers' beliefs about how students learn?* Watch a classroom, and you can discern many beliefs of any dedicated teacher. A social studies teacher I know has artwork and objects on display from many different cultures; she believes in a culturally relevant curriculum. Another teacher starts each morning advisory period with a game; she believes school should be fun. A science teacher has students building dragsters, robots, and rockets; he believes students need hands-on activities to learn science concepts.

These are all valid beliefs. However, unexamined beliefs can have unintended consequences. For example, if the science teacher doesn't plan the hands-on activities with clear learning goals and a method for checking for understanding, the students may remember how to use a band saw rather than the laws of force and motion. And the energetic, game-playing morning meetings, if not run within safe boundaries, may alienate some quiet students.

More important for professional development, though, is understanding that change initiatives often require changing these ingrained, habitual beliefs, which is no easy task.

(2) *How tightly tied are teachers' beliefs to their own strengths as educators?* Other factors influence teacher beliefs, such as having a strong mentor

with a different strength, deliberate effort to work on a developmental need, or the observation of another teacher who effectively uses a different skill. However, for the teachers I've worked with, the relationship between strengths and beliefs is very close.

Listen to a teacher's explanation of his teaching philosophy:

> I set up an experience, and the students take it from there. An administrator once told me that when he observed a teacher, he wasn't looking for what the teacher was doing but for what the students were doing. And that told him how good the teacher was. . . . It's really a belief of mine.

This teacher excels at designing engaging, hands-on guided-inquiry lessons; is it any wonder that he believes it's the best way to run a classroom?

Another teacher loves creative activities and tries to leave room in her assignments for students to express themselves as individuals. Is it any wonder that she resists providing too much structure in her directions for fear that she'll stifle creativity?

Successful people in any field work out of their strengths, not their weaknesses. Michael Phelps isn't a jockey. Cesar Chavez didn't remain behind the scenes, helping individuals in quiet ways. Further, we need to use our strengths; being forced to overuse our weaknesses often leads to fatigue, illness, and stress (Quenk, 2002). Classroom practices and educational beliefs of teachers *should* correlate with their strengths.

However, *here's the problem:* When I've asked teachers about the students they have the most trouble reaching or feel most helpless with, they describe students who don't share their strengths or fit the mold of their educational beliefs. Look at the comparisons in Chart 1.1.

Teachers need to work out of their strengths, but understanding how those strengths drive their beliefs about what "should" happen in their classrooms is key to understanding how those beliefs might affect students who are very different from them.

Chart 1.1

Teacher strength or belief	Type of student they describe as most difficult for them to teach
Creating a classroom where students can express themselves as individuals. Teachers need to engage them in ways that help them grow.	"The apathetic ones. It's like, 'Whatever,' the whole time. They may not be saying it, but it's the way they sit; they turn away. I'm more effective with students who sometimes misbehave, even, than when they don't care."
"I'm very organized, and that helps provide structure, which I think a lot of kids need."	"Extremely disorganized, like oh my Lord, especially this one. You know I made him a take-home folder and a bring-back folder? It didn't help."

Teacher strength or belief	Type of student they describe as most difficult for them to teach
Using hands-on projects to teach concepts and then reinforcing them through reading and lecture. Most units are therefore several weeks long.	"Ones with short attention spans . . . When I get excited about something and they're not quite staying with me, I'm like, 'Come on, this is [laugh].'"
"I make math fun. Kids come to math scared, and they've had some pretty awful math teachers. They leave here, like, 'Oh, that was really fun. This was math?'"	"The quiet, withdrawn student."

(3) *What are the teachers' beliefs about their roles in student success?* I've watched teachers give an assignment, yet only half of the students in the room take out paper and pencil to complete it. The teachers tell me that students are making their own choices about whether or not they do their work and are choosing to fail. The problem comes when the teachers stop looking for strategies to help students make better choices.

I've heard teachers say, "If I give 'stretch' assignments, the parents just do the homework for their child. And you should see how angry they get if an essay they wrote receives less than top marks." The problem comes when they believe there are no avenues for helping these parents choose more effective ways of being involved.

(4) *What else keeps teachers from trying new practices?* Besides the overall difficulty of change and the grip that habits and beliefs have on us, consider what other factors might be present. For example, if previous change efforts brought little or no positive results, teachers may be reluctant to sign on for the next one.

In urban settings, another factor that feeds reluctance to change is that teachers who can successfully manage their classrooms are fearful about the chaos new practices could bring. One teacher told me,

> I have a lot of fear, and that holds me back from taking risks and trying a lot of ideas that have been forming around in my head, which could be so cool, but I'm scared of trying them because I'm afraid they'll fail . . . maybe the ideas are ideal, but I'm not always so sure my students are the ideal ones to try them with . . .

Change is a lot of work. Why would you do it if your classroom is under control, the majority of your students are making progress, you're aware of significant factors contributing to student failure that are outside your control, and the changes either don't fit with your beliefs about education or require that you operate out of weaknesses?

There's an old rule of thumb that it takes thirty days of constant, conscious effort to form a new habit. That's when someone *wants* to change—and becomes conscious of beliefs that need changing! When habit is tightly tied to beliefs, then the approach to change needs to be respectful, deliberate, and gradual.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THAT ACKNOWLEDGES TEACHER STRENGTHS AND BELIEFS

It might help to reframe professional development by remembering that the teachers are, in a sense, the students. Consider, then, how John Dewey (1902/1990) summarized the problem with traditional education or, one might say, traditional professional development: "The center of gravity is outside the child. It is in the teacher, the textbook, anywhere and everywhere you please except in the immediate instincts and activities of the child himself" (p. 34). Too often, the professional development focus is test scores, curriculum, team structures, and student learning—everything, it seems, but the teachers who have to do the changing.

Dewey (1902/1990) added an apt description of the application of discipline to get people to do things that don't hold their interest, all too often identified with force or drill, "and drill is conceived after the mechanical analogy of driving, by unremitting blows, a foreign substance into a resistant material" (p. 63). That's how much of the teacher accountability literature reads—how to get resisters on board, how to enforce district policies, and how to monitor or supervise teachers (see, for example, Eller & Eller, 2011; Evans, 2001; Tye, 2000).

Instead, let's concentrate on teaching—whether one is teaching students or adults—as an art that takes place when "a human being cooperates with the product so that the outcome is an experience that is enjoyed because of its liberating and ordered properties" (Dewey, 1934, p. 214). Teacher-centered professional development, then, has the goal of liberating teachers, not controlling them. Here's the big point:

> *Professional development involves the art of helping teachers understand where their strengths and beliefs lock them into practices that limit their freedom to help students to succeed. This isn't freedom for teachers to do as they please but freedom for them to entertain possibilities and stay open to new avenues for professional growth.*

This understanding of professional development changes our goal from implementing a mandate to helping teachers develop their own sense of discipline. We want teachers to habitually examine their beliefs and practices and then move toward affirming, modifying, or changing them as necessary to help all students learn. Let's go back to Hannah's story to see how this works.

A COMMON FRAMEWORK

Imagine if the school had expected me to tell Hannah, "Start discourse *now*. Back off on the direct instruction." For one thing, she knew her classroom practices were effective for many students. For another, I'd be attacking her core beliefs and her identity as a teacher and as a human being. To engage in deep conversations where we can honor different positions and acknowledge the merits of diverse opinions, participants need a shared common framework that can help them surface their beliefs.

In my work, personality type and the cognitive processes popularized through the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® tool (MBTI®) serves as a common framework. As Hannah's teaching team grew in their understanding of our common framework, instead of talking about "good" and "bad" teaching practices, they discussed how students with different cognitive processes were helped or hindered by different lessons or instruction. The framework created an environment where teachers could safely examine their own beliefs and practices. Hannah was able to use it to articulate why she worried about overemphasizing classroom discussions to me and to her team.

> Part II of this book discusses developing an effective common framework, using type as an illustration. Other school reform models may meet the criteria if they have a cognitive-processes component and help teachers understand their beliefs.

To be useful tools for coaching and collaboration, common frameworks need to meet several criteria:

- The framework describes preferences for learning in a nonjudgmental way, encompassing both adult and student cognitive processes.
- The framework should be strengths based rather than describing the deficits of different styles.
- The framework also needs to work within and honor different cultures. Some models are too linear, too logical, or based too directly in one culture to apply across the diverse student populations our schools now serve.

Using such a framework opens conversations about beliefs. Further, it reminds change agents of their *own* educational biases and how much they are asking teachers to change. Once the teachers can use a common framework to identify their tightly held beliefs and habits, the next stage of the process begins: providing evidence to help them modify or change beliefs that don't fit with the reality of their students' needs. I use the framework to consider how strategies and practices might fit differently into the grid shown in Chart 1.2 for different teachers.

While Hannah had started the year squarely in Quadrant I, she sought me out as we neared the halfway mark of the school year. "My first-hour class has me really concerned. The more I think about how they froze when I handed out a higher-level task . . . I don't think they even finished reading it, let alone tried to think it through before saying, 'Just tell us how to do it.' So I was wondering . . . do you think that working on discourse might increase their confidence? If so, I need your help."

Yes, the mounting evidence she'd seen in team meetings had moved her to Quadrant III: Discourse wouldn't be natural, but she was now motivated to give

Chart 1.2

II. Natural, Not Interested A teacher is either bored with a strategy or no longer reflects adequately on its use. The coach and teacher might partner to find ways to refresh interest in what is working.	IV. Natural, Motivated An initiative fits well with the teacher's strengths and beliefs. A coach's role involves helping the teacher identify key components necessary for success and evidence of those components.
I. Unnatural, Not Interested An initiative or strategy isn't a good fit for a teacher's natural style, and the teacher shows little interest. If it is part of the school plan, a coach's role is to find evidence that might motivate the teacher try it.	III. Unnatural, Motivated A teacher recognizes the value of an initiative or strategy but knows it will involve a major shift in practice. A coach's role involves ensuring that the teacher receives the support needed to develop the necessary skills and habits.

it a try. The look on Hannah's face didn't exactly convey confidence that discourse—or coaching—would help that first-hour class, but I quickly agreed to work with her. I knew it would be my best chance to create an experience that might help Hannah rethink her beliefs about teaching and learning.

PROVIDING EXPERIENCES THAT INFLUENCE BELIEFS

Dewey (1916) recognized the key role of experiences in helping us grasp theories, processes, and ideas. He said,

> An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance. An experience, a very humble experience, is capable of generating and carrying any amount of theory (or intellectual content), but a theory apart from an experience cannot be definitely grasped even as theory. (p. 144)

Because of this, creating *quality* experiences requires two emphases: (1) making them initially engaging or instructive *and* (2) ensuring that they positively influence beliefs.

Creating an engaging experience for Hannah meant that I had to remember that our cognitive processes are almost complete opposites. I'd need to coach to meet her needs, not the needs of teachers like me who love working with unpredictable lessons and new methods—I struggle to teach anything the same way twice. Combining discourse and high-level tasks is my kind of teaching and pretty much the opposite of Hannah's style.

I asked, "Are you sure you want to try this?"

Hannah replied with half of a smile, "You can get this going by modeling it for me with my first-hour class. And please find the problems as well. I'll have enough trouble shifting instruction without needing to worry about whether I've found 'group-worthy' tasks."

EXPERIENCE INSURANCE

Remember that our beliefs are so powerful that we tend to only note information that reinforces them. I spent the next four first-hour periods in Hannah's room to create the right experience.

- The first day, I facilitated the group work using rich problems that can be solved in a variety of ways, such as, "Lucky you! You have nine tennis balls . . . and four shopping bags. Your challenge is to put all the balls in the bags in such a way that there is an odd number of balls in each bag. That is, each bag must contain one, three, five, seven, or nine balls. Can it be done?" Hannah took observation notes on teacher moves, student engagement (or lack thereof), and her questions. She later questioned me about my moves, captured in writing how she would make each of the moves, and discussed the resulting process with me.

That first day, we only worked through two problems. I modeled asking open-ended questions to help each group articulate thinking and to hold high expectations for participation and problem solving for each student. A breakthrough in this room of learned helplessness came when one of the "slow" students asked, "Can a bag go inside a bag?" The solution, in fact, requires it. A ripple of excitement moved through the class as they realized that they were to think instead of follow a procedure.

After class, I carefully pointed out evidence of shifts in student attitudes, with comments such as,

> "Did you see the change in how students listened to each group member after [a struggling student] provided the idea that led to a solution?"
>
> "Did you note that for the second problem, students seemed to grasp the importance of individually rewriting the question and considering what they knew and weren't sure about?"
>
> "Did you note how quickly the students readied their materials for the second problem? What did you see?"

- On the second day, I started class by displaying examples of notes from the day before that captured student thinking. Students practiced using the discussion prompts they'd been learning (see "Group Work Process" sidebar) as the class worked together to improve clarity of representations. We had time for two more problems; Hannah took notes during the first problem and joined me in facilitating high-level

Group Work Process

1. ***Listen*** to the problem. Follow along as it is read aloud.
2. ***Think and write*** during silent time about how you might solve it. **Do not solve it yet!**
   - Restate it in your own words.
   - What questions do you have?
   - What strategies might you use?
   - What past problems does it remind you of?
3. ***Discuss*** during group time. Use phrases such as
   - I wonder . . . ?
   - Say more about that . . .
   - Help me to understand . . .
   - Can anyone talk to that . . .
   - Can anyone build on that idea?
   - I agree and . . .
   - I disagree with _____ because . . .
4. ***Record*** your group's solution.
   - Show your work!!!
   - Define *x*.
   - Use diagrams, pictures, and labels.
   - Ask yourselves, Can someone else understand our reasoning?
5. ***Check*** for group understanding.
   - Can every group member explain your answer and justify it?

thinking in the groups through various teacher moves, such as, "Who can restate what Amir just said?" and, "Jemma, can you explain this representation to me?"

- Before class on the third morning, Hannah and I reviewed the "Group Work Process" she had constructed from her notes from the first two days (see sidebar) that helped to set expectations for the students and gave Hannah the structure she loved. Hannah introduced four problems, and we both roamed among the groups.
- By the fourth morning, our roles had reversed. I took the observation notes, and Hannah facilitated the group work. New Zealand educator Margaret Mooney (1988), who created this *gradual release of responsibility model*, summarized it as, "I do. We do. You do."

At the end of class on the fourth morning, Hannah took a deep breath and said, "I really understand the power of discourse now. I probably won't plan lessons around it quite as often as you would, but discourse is a permanent part of my classroom." Yes, by understanding Hannah's strengths and beliefs, I'd been able to adjust my coaching so she was able to join in the school vision for discourse and group work.

MY VISION OF DIFFERENTIATED COACHING

What if you could orchestrate a dream event? For me, it'd be a hands-on fiction workshop with J. K. Rowling, along with a few of my closest friends! Then, picture arriving at that event in a vehicle befitting of the VIP you'd be. What would you choose? I'd opt for a '66 Thunderbird.

Wouldn't it be cool if teachers envisioned their *coach*, originally a vehicle for taking valuable people from where they were to where they wanted to be, as that kind of dream vehicle, helping them to realize their vision of an ideal classroom, where students are learning and loving it? Differentiated coaching makes it easier for coaches to convey to teachers that sense of being valued that highly.

COACHING DEFINED

Coaching is the art of identifying and developing a person's strengths. Even when teachers need to build skills in areas that are natural weaknesses for them, coaches help them do that through techniques that utilize strengths. *Differentiated* coaching provides a neutral way, identifying strengths, potential struggles, and customized strategies for personal development. Compare the norms of differentiated coaching with mentoring and peer coaching models.

- Coaching is a partnership between the coach and the person being coached. Plans develop through conversation.

- Coaching recognizes that individual differences will and should occur in how most changes are implemented in the classroom. A coach works to understand how a practice fits with an individual teacher's style and then helps that teacher develop his or her own strategies within the parameters of a school reform effort.
- Coaching is *not* a method for squelching resistance to change without understanding the underlying causes of that resistance. Instead, it is a tool for understanding the fears and obstacles, real or imagined, that teachers face and then addressing those obstacles in ways that provide support for the teacher.
- Finally, coaching is far from a "white rat" supervision tool, where once a teacher's strengths or learning style is identified, a given set of practices is applied. Each teacher comes with not just strengths and beliefs but concerns, experiences, models of excellence, tried-and-true methods, and prior successes and failures that also influence how they teach—and how they need to be coached.

WHEN TO COACH? WHO CAN COACH?

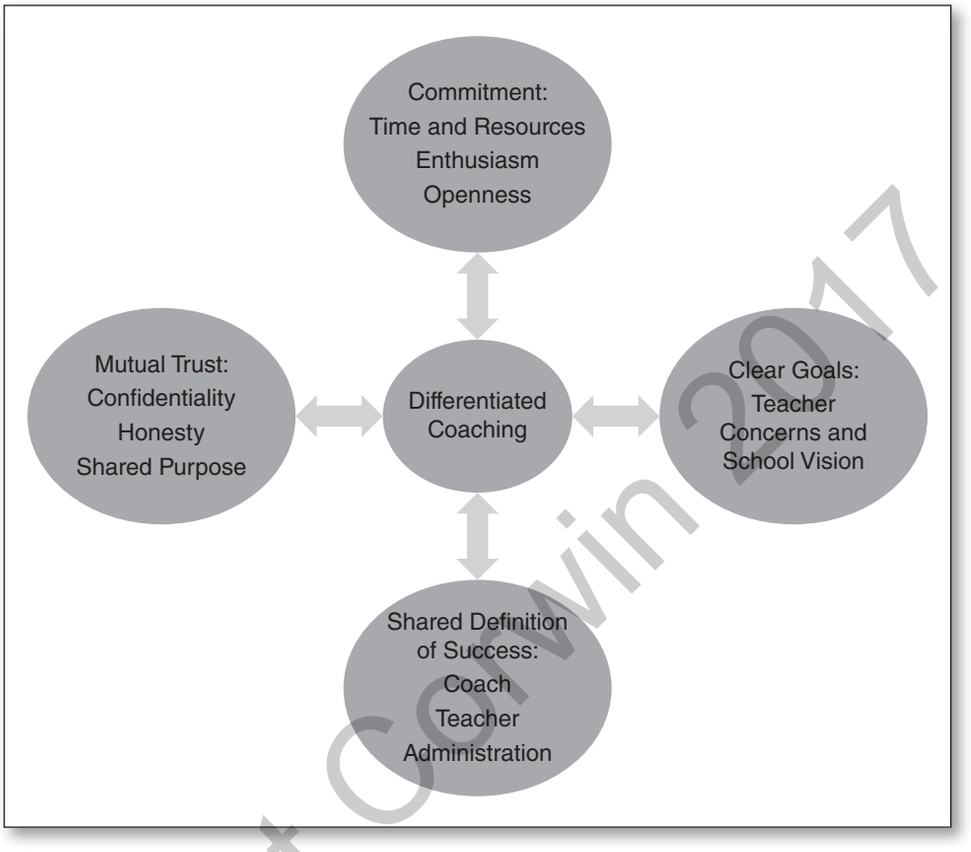
I've seen policy statements, job descriptions, and other sources that are deeply stuck in either/or thinking about who can coach and when to coach. You're either a coach *or* an evaluator/supervisor, which forces redundancies in observations. You're either a literacy coach *or* a numeracy coach, which overlooks shared core competencies. And so on. There is some truth and, in general, sound rationale behind such policies, but know that *both/and* thinking around these issues is being implemented in many schools, leading to both synergy and efficiency. Look at Chart 1.3, and consider how addressing trust, commitment, common goals, and a shared definition of success can allow for a broader definition of who can coach and when.

How do you build trust if the coach also has some evaluative role? By changing language to models that reflect a growth model for teaching. No one is born a teacher, and in fact, it takes about five years of deliberate practice to develop true expertise. Ericsson, Prietula, and Cokely (2007), in a synthesis of over one hundred studies on developing expertise, point to the deliberate practice of specific skills as the key and emphasize that it takes time and mentoring. Mielke and Frontier (2012) add,

> Why, then, are we reluctant to acknowledge that a teacher may take dozens of hours to learn a new instructional strategy? As a profession, we need to transcend the idea that only teachers who are struggling need an improvement plan. If the school views the need for improvement as a liability, why would teachers ever acknowledge their need for deliberate practice? (p. 12)

G. E. Hall and Hord (2010) suggest categorizing a teacher's progress on a competency as "Mechanical, Routine, Refinement, Integration, Renewal." Marzano (2011) uses "Not using, Beginning, Developing, Applying, Innovating,

Chart 1.3 Four Essentials for Differentiated Coaching



Mastery." Thinking in terms of growth can allow for synthesis between the roles of coach, evaluator, and administrator.

I've trained and worked with administrators, external consultants, instructional coaches, peer coaches, teacher leaders, all of whom helped teachers meet the needs of more students in an atmosphere of mutual trust, successfully providing that vehicle for moving valuable teachers from where they are to where they wish to be. Their formal title didn't matter as much as

- their recognition of the difficulty of change in general,
- their ability to build trust, and
- their "loose/tight" differentiated coaching that acknowledged different paths to the same goal.

While there are certainly elements of school reform efforts, instructional strategies, and other initiatives where implementation with fidelity is essential for achieving the desired results, insisting on uniform implementation processes and monitoring with checklists may not result in fidelity because the teachers themselves are different. The changes affect them differently—they'll have different struggles, different successes, and different needs.

Hannah responded to differentiated, not just instructional, coaching. In the next chapters, we'll take an in-depth look at each of the elements of this process.

REFLECTION

1. Consider your own strengths as an educator, a student, and a coach. Do any of these strengths tie to your own beliefs about education?
2. Reflect on your own strengths, using the following questions. Then, use one or two to explore the strengths and beliefs of one of the teachers you work with.
   - What do you think are your biggest strengths as a teacher?
   - If you could wave a magic wand, what two things would you change in your classroom or this school?
   - What one thing should be done consistently by everyone in the building?
   - Tell me about a time you were successful helping a child succeed.
   - How might you describe the students you find hardest to reach academically?
3. Do you have a common framework for discussing teaching and learning? How well does it fit the criteria listed on page 78?
4. List a few of the initiatives you've been involved with. Consider where you might have fit into the matrix in Chart 1.2 (page 18) when they were first introduced to you. What, if any, evidence or experiences helped you shift to a different quadrant?
5. In Chart 1.4 (page 24), consider the self-reported strengths of each teacher and the beliefs about how students learn. Reflect on or discuss in your small group the kinds of strategies or classroom changes each teacher might resist. (Think through the specific initiatives with which you are involved for ideas. Given their strengths and beliefs, why might they doubt the effectiveness of these initiatives or be afraid to try them?)

NOTES

1. Names and details have been changed. Parts of Hannah's story are composites of several teachers.
2. Effect size studies quantitatively answer the question, "So how big an effect did this really have?" Of the 150 different influences on student achievement studied by Hattie (2012), classroom discussion ranked seventh, with an effect size of .88; direct instruction ranked twenty-ninth, with an effect size of .59; and teacher clarity, one of Hannah's strengths, ranked ninth, with an effect size of .75.

Chart 1.4

Strength	Making learning fun through games and group activities	Organization, structured-learning tasks	Creative, open-ended projects	Teaching concepts through hands-on, constructivist learning
Belief	Fun fosters school success	Structure and organization foster school success	Students' opportunities for individual expression lead to school success	Student engagement will lead to success
Problem they wish to solve	Students aren't practicing basic skills on their own, no support at home	Students fail to complete work or lose homework	Some students seem apathetic about every assignment	A lot of students don't complete big projects
Strategies or changes this teacher might resist				