

Using Making Meaning in a Student-Centered Coaching Approach

By Ann Stewart | Categories: Making Meaning, Implementation

As professionals, we can all agree that the goal of school-based coaching is to improve student learning by providing teachers with continuous, relevant, and job-embedded support. But what impact is it having on student learning? Author Diane Sweeney, in her book *Student-Centered Coaching: A Guide for K-8 Coaches and Principals*, talks about moving our coaching lens from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered approach.

Teacher-centered coaching almost always focuses on what the teacher is doing—the teaching actions—with the assumption that if we improve the teaching, we can improve student learning and outcomes. Student-centered coaching, on the other hand, is about setting specific targets for students that are rooted in the standards and curriculum, and promoting working together to ensure that the set targets are met. Impact is measured on the basis of student learning rather than how a teacher feels or the acquisition of specific teaching skills (Sweeney 2011, 9).

In a student-centered coaching approach, once instructional targets are identified, the use of data and student work is analyzed collaboratively to make informed decisions about instruction. At Center for the Collaborative Classroom, we've been all about just this type of approach both to foster student achievement and to better teacher decision-making through the use of a set of formative assessments, clearly identified lesson objectives, and instruction designed to meet those needs. Let's look at the *Making Meaning*® program for examples.

Step 1: Identify What the Students Know

The formative assessments in *Making Meaning* enable teachers to reflect on students' academic and social growth over time.

- **Class Assessments**—During a class assessment, teachers can randomly observe students working in pairs or individually as they ask a series of questions that provide focus for the observations. These assessments occur about once a week during parts of the lesson where students are demonstrating their use of the unit strategy. By listening in to student conversations and thinking around texts, teachers can better determine if more time is to be spent on a particular strategy and any possible extension work they might consider. An assessment note in the *Teacher's Manual* alerts users to when this assessment is recommended.
- **Individualized Daily Reading (IDR) Conference Notes**—If the overall goal of instruction is to ensure students have a set of metacognitive strategies for approaching a variety of texts independently, then the IDR Conference Notes are key! By listening to students read and talk about their self-selected texts, teachers can identify areas of strength and note areas where students need more support. In the beginning, notes focus on knowing students as readers and making sure they are selecting appropriately leveled texts. Then the conferences focus more on the acquisition and use of the comprehension strategies as well as their development as readers as the year progresses. As with the class assessments, an assessment note in the

Teacher's Manual alerts users when conferring is recommended.

- **Student Reading Goals and Interests Survey**—The first conferring questions in *Making Meaning* are all about discovering your students as readers. What are their interests? What authors do they enjoy reading? How do they feel about themselves as readers? Once teachers have analyzed the class responses, that information can be shared with students, support staff, and parents. Repeating this survey at the end of the year can serve to show students' growth as readers.

Step 2: Identify What the Standards, Curriculum, or Program Deems They Need to Know

Each *Making Meaning* unit and the lessons within the unit clearly identify the learning targets that address the standards. The unit's Overview provides a "big picture" look at those standards as they unfold across the unit. Each week's Overview narrows our lens a bit as we dive more specifically into the comprehension strategy focus as well as the social development focus for the week. It is this combination of attention to social development combined with strategy development that make curriculum from Center for the Collaborative Classroom unique and wholly supportive of both teachers and students. Taking a deeper dive, the individual lesson targets for each day in a given week are identified with a lead off: "In this lesson, the students." Those previously mentioned class assessments are sprinkled throughout the unit as a reminder to the teachers to pay close attention to the students' gaining proficiency with the lesson targets identified. Teachers will acquire a well-developed knowledge of the standards and the curriculum they teach.

Step 3: Design and Implement Instruction to Meet Needs

Making Meaning is research-based and classroom-tested instruction shaped by pilot classrooms around the nation to assure its effectiveness. Fitting into a typical classroom day, the instruction is accessible for all students as it includes suggestions for extending the learning and supports for English Language Learners and students with various reading levels. An easy to follow daily structure, teacher notes, vocabulary notes and suggestions, and embedded technology supports enable teachers to build a repertoire of instructional strategies to support student learning.

Working in tandem with the *Making Meaning* materials, coaches can build communities of teachers who are skilled at analyzing student work and behaviors to make instructional decisions that best support student achievement. Coaching can be about improving student achievement rather than just being about improving teachers. With its focus on providing high-quality supports for teachers during the workday, instructional coaches can leverage this amazing program for professional development and shift the lens of instruction directly on to students.

Resource

Sweeney, Diane. 2011. *Student-Centered Coaching: A Guide for K-8 Coaches and Principals*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
dianesweeney.com.