**Coaching Journal**

Coach: Shanna M. Irving

Coached Partner Pseudonym and Information: Bob, Special Education co-teacher in Coordinate Algebra

1st Session: February 9, 2015

**Strategies:**

As our initial session, this hour was dedicated to discussing perceived areas of difficulty in order to determine a meaningful place to start (Knight, 2007, p. 22). Because I am not a math teacher and the School Strategic Plan indicates that subgroups underperform in Coordinate Algebra (*XYZ High School: School Strategic Plan 2014-2015,* 2014), it was necessary to begin our sessions by getting the teacher’s insight. He explained two critical areas: (1) the lead teacher, who writes the lesson plans, spends far more time modeling and instructing than the students spend actually working problems; and (2) students come to the class with gaps in underpinning mathematical knowledge critical to understanding trigonometric and algebraic functions. Of Knight’s (2007) Big Four, the areas we identified for intervention focus were direct instruction and formative assessment (p. 23).

Not wanting to tackle both at once, I decided to focus first on direct instruction. Because the lead teacher was dominating the work done in class and the special education students were all failing the course and not at all understanding the homework, a more effective model would be a flipped model. For students already used to spending time working on math at home, the only change would be what they do at home and what they do in class. I suggested that Bob increase the number of videos on his blog and include a video discussion and note-taking requirement as homework before concepts are introduced in class. This flipped classroom model would allow students time to take notes and write questions at their own pace and work on the math problems previously assigned as homework during class time.

**Skill and Affective Changes:**

Bob, a lover of technology, wanted to know more about the flipped classroom model. He liked the idea but worried that the lead teacher would not want to change her ways or allow him time to pull the special education students out of class to attempt it. He also mentioned how difficult it might be to change teaching and homework methods so many weeks into the course.

**Reflection on Challenges and Solution:**

Special education teachers can feel helpless as co-teachers. Still, I left the session excited and ready to put together a presentation for him to demonstrate the idea to the lead teacher. Assessing first what the teacher sees as areas of concern was certainly the right way to go; Bob was able to provide me with significant insight about the everyday workings and not-workings of the math class he co-teaches. I am hopeful that intervention at the direct instruction level will help Bob and his students become more successful.

2nd Session: February 16, 2015

**Strategies:**

After sending the presentation on a model flipped classroom and being denied the opportunity to model implementation myself (time constraints being what they are in public education), the goals for this meeting were to discuss the model flipped model classroom, explaining and clarifying (Knight, 2007, p. 102) any elements that were confusing or unclear in alignment to the course goals and to create advance organizers for students to use during the at-home portion of the flip.

Bob’s report, however, makes it necessary to be flexible (Knight, 2007). Because he feels powerless to change the structure of classroom activities and thinks that the flipped model is a method that should be employed starting at the beginning of the semester instead of halfway through, we decide to spend time researching and considering ways to approach the issue of students lacking underpinning knowledge.

**Skill and Affective Changes:**

During the session, Bob showed me some videos he put on his blog for students to use to preview content. He also, however, reported that he had not offered students the chance to complete content overview notes on the video in exchange for time to actually practice working the problems in class with him instead of at home after not understanding the day’s instruction. Without incentive to watch the videos, students did not watch the videos. Though Bob saw the need for a change and the potential of this change in particular, he felt overwhelmed by the speed at which the lead teacher was moving ahead and could not find time to introduce the new method to students. He wants to move in a new direction, so we decided to meet again later this week.

**Reflection on Challenges and Solution:**

After this letdown, I find myself wishing I were the classroom teacher and could just make the changes myself, and I am sure Bob feels this even more acutely than I do. The Attempt, Attack, Abandon Cycle (Knight, 2007, p. 200) did not even make its way into the classroom; it began and rotated from one session to the next. What Andy Hargreaves called “pressing immediacy” (Knight, 2007, p. 4)—three to five class days between each unit test, two months until the End of Course (EOC) exam, several absentee students, and the obstinacy of student apathy—made such a large shift much too overwhelming in idea, though in practice it may have worked fine. We thus decided to try a new intervention, smaller in scope and easier to implement, that would address the gaps in underpinning content knowledge Bob believes get in their way.

3rd Session: February 19, 2015

**Strategies:**

During our last session, Bob theorized that each unit includes prerequisite knowledge that underpins the concepts, and that without that knowledge, students cannot possible understand the unit. He further posited that the current method of assessing those gaps, one-to-one assistance with working problems just presented in class, is inefficient, particularly in a teacher-centered course. We discussed means of gathering that information more quickly and using it as a basis for supporting students and decided to try Google Forms as diagnostic assessment surveys students can take on their phones during class.

I modeled use (Knight, 2007, p. 164) of Google Forms by walking Bob through the creation and sharing of a Google Form. He then created a Google Form survey with ten questions, each representing one underpinning concept for the unit his students were currently studying. He decided to deploy the Form as a diagnostic/formative assessment the following Friday in order to prepare his study guide for Monday’s unit exam study period.

**Skill and Affective Changes:**

Far more comfortable with this change than with the flipped classroom model, Bob loved this technique and has even begun considering other ways to use Google Forms for immediate assessment data. He was convinced that he will be better able to help students, both more effectively and more efficiently, because of this tool.

**Reflection on Challenges and Solution:**

Though I understand that incremental change is easier to accept, it is frustrating that big problems like high failure rates did not, in the teachers’ minds, necessitate big change. The lead teacher verbalized willingness to relinquish control of the special education students’ learning to Bob but was unwilling to slow down to allow for an attempt of the shift in models. The maybe-next-year attitude has left all of the special education students failing the course. All of them. Still, the Google Form usage is a step toward positive change, and its implementation is imminent and promising. The need to overcome my personal frustration and focus on movement in a direction that actually allowed for movement was a lesson learned this week.

4th Session: February 25, 2015

**Strategies:**

Earlier this week, Bob reported that students performed better after reviewing content identified in the Google Forms data as knowledge gaps. Because of this success, I decided to focus this session on creating graphic organizers that help students see the interconnectedness of the mathematical concepts that underpin and create each unit’s purpose. They could use the concepts on the Google Forms surveys in combination with the current unit’s focus as entry essentials for their graphic organizers. After some research on the Framing Routine (Knight, 2007, p. 82), I decided to present the concept to Bob and discuss ways to manipulate it to fit his course needs.

**Skill and Affective Changes:**

With four types of algebraic functions on the unit the students were studying, Bob decided that a frame would be a good way to take notes. He “would like to try this strategy at some point” but was much more interested in discussing the effectiveness of Google Forms as formative assessments. He was clearly excited about the success and ready to push farther in that direction. Again, he was hesitant to try a new approach to instruction itself, citing frequent absenteeism and time constraints.

**Reflection on Challenges and Solution:**

External pressures can be deadly to change initiatives, and I suddenly realized that I have the tendency to over-reach. In doing so, I have this time and at other times damaged my cause and discouraged those whom I meant to encourage. In my research for the Applied Quantitative and Qualitative Research course, I built a unit-long research plan for other teachers to implement, and it was simply too complex for me to ask someone else to implement, and the difficulties that arose with the technology infrastructure and the changes in teaching habits discouraged them from technology usage altogether this year. Attempting to change the instructional approaches of Bob and, by extension, the lead teacher was overreaching, and I have definitely met with evidence that slow and easy approaches to change are easier for teachers to digest. Today’s session, predicated on small success, was much more upbeat than the previous one, which followed massive failure; it was in this way made clear to me that incremental successes can lead to big changes but too much too soon can quickly kill an idea in its shell.

5th Session: March 2, 2015

**Strategies:**

Because the positive energy and sense of purpose in our coaching partnership budded from the Google Forms success and Knight (2007) indicated that it is best to “build the sidewalk…where [Bob] want[ed] to go” (p. 186), Bob and I decided to spend this session discussing ways to expand from formative to summative assessment using Google Forms. The data tracking capabilities could then powerfully inform the special education students’ individualized education plan (IEP) goal tracking percentages. Bob even mentioned creating a professional development for the other math co-teachers at the school, which we decided to work on together for the upcoming workshop assessment.

**Skill and Affective Changes:**

Bob demonstrated positive energy and desire to pursue Google Forms as diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment tools. He also reported having spent more time uploading videos and helpful content to his blog than he did previously, suggesting that the flipped classroom model idea at least planted a proverbial seed in his mind. He did not specify and plans for use of the Framing Routine during this session, but he did show some interest in learning more about it. Ultimately, his lack of control over lesson planning and the lead teacher’s traditional pedagogy and rapid instructional speed inhibited his desire to even mention the strategy to her or think too long about it himself.

**Reflection on Challenges and Solution:**

I did not realize that my overreaching was ineffective pedagogy that needed replacing. Using one incremental change to address and resolve one specific issue at a time will be my approach moving forward. Some teachers want to change. Some do not. Much of the feedback I have received recently even from teachers open to change is predicated on the idea that the tools and strategies I present are “extra”, ideas better suited to non-EOC courses. The gap in logic astounds me still: with 100% of the special education students in two class periods failing a teacher’s EOC course, how could ideas for significant change not be welcomed? Many teachers—myself included before becoming involved in the instructional technology specialist program—have yet to recognize that technology tools are not “extra stuff to do” but new ways to do what was not working before. Hopefully, Bob and I can write a workshop that introduces this simple change to his colleagues and follows through with support that leads to effective implementation and improvements in students’ math knowledge school-wide. Far-reaching and long-term are better than overreaching any day.

References

Knight, J. (2007*). Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction.*

Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

*XYZ High School: School Strategic Plan 2014-2015*. (2014). Some City, GA: Some

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