

# After the Teacher Observation... Then What?

## The Educational Coach: Improving Teacher Practice through Feedback

*SBI(I) Situation in the classroom, Behavior of the coachee, Intended audience, Inquiry question*

### EDUCATIONAL COACHES IN THE STATE OF MICHIGAN

Educational coaches in the state of Michigan are part of a coaching community called Coaching 101. This professional community, motivated by the need for instructional program coherence, has received training in the foundational coaching skills guided by two theories of action: 1) If we ground the coaches understanding of their work in the context of the instructional core, then coaches' effort will be focused on improvements that reach the classroom, and 2) if we develop the coaches understanding of the importance of coherence, then the coaches will use coherence as an organizing framework on multiple levels. Educational coaches mediate thinking, clarify goals, and build capacity for the purpose of increasing student achievement. The mission of Coaching 101 is to establish a cadre of educational coaches who have strong knowledge, common language, and skills to promote school improvement across the State of Michigan.



The foundational belief of Coaching 101 is mediation, the skillful use of coaching tools/skills that support the person being coached to clarify, refine, modify, or shift thinking to be educationally responsive to diverse populations of students. Inherent in this belief is the assumption of the coach's capacity to take on the identity of a mediator for the purpose of transforming practice. Mediators hold the mindset that individuals have unlimited capacity; they intentionally use mediation to facilitate continuous learning. This is a key component of Coaching 101. The medium is the coaching conversation which is basic to every role (coach, principal, teacher, and student) in the educational setting. The focus of the conversation is around the instructional core, the day-to-day interaction of teacher, student, and content. You don't change performance without changing the instructional core, the relationship between the teacher and the student in the presence of content. The result of the conversation (higher levels of thinking) is the catalyst that leads the coachee to action. Action translates to improved instructional practices and increased student achievement that occurs from teachers reflecting on their practice and receiving feedback from a skilled educational coach. "For teachers to learn it's important for the teacher to be the one doing the intellectual work." (Danielson, 2009)

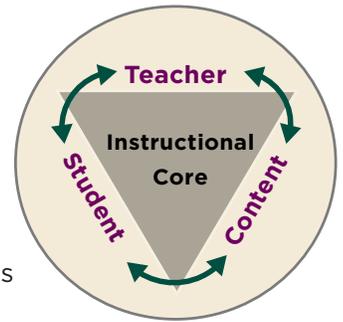
### THE INSTRUCTIONAL CORE: A BALANCING ACT

Teaching is very complex; it is challenging both intellectually and emotionally. It requires knowledge about the subject being taught, the curriculum, appropriate teaching and learning strategies, and the abilities, interests, and personalities of the learners. If all of this is managed well, students are the beneficiaries.



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Richard Elmore of Harvard University (2009) explored the relationship between the teacher and student in the presence of content, which describes the instructional core. According to Elmore, there are only three ways to improve student learning at scale: 1) raise the level of content that students are taught; 2) increase the teachers' skill and knowledge that they bring to the teaching of that content; and 3) increase the level of students' active learning (engagement) of the content. Elmore states that for any positive impact on student learning to take place, changes in any single element of the instructional core must be accompanied by corresponding changes in the other two elements. Raising the level of content must be accompanied by enhancing the teachers' skill level in teaching content. Raising the level of learning expectations for students has to be accompanied by changes in the teacher's thinking about student learning capabilities and their own abilities. How does skill improve? Teachers' thinking about what they do and their awareness about their beliefs around capacity become important variables. Research confirms that student achievement will only occur with improved teacher practice, which in turn requires ongoing reflection, self-assessment, and feedback. This is an entry point for the coach.



### A MODEL OF FEEDBACK

Most conversations are grounded in what has been observed in a classroom. The conversation is expanded when the coach skillfully digs below the surface, to help teachers examine underlying assumptions and likely outcomes of different approaches. The current model of feedback in many schools involves the supervisor doing the intellectual work disseminating information. It is a passive process for the teacher and does not facilitate major change in the teacher's thinking. Figure 1 presents a framework in which feedback can be considered. A model of feedback that we have found to be powerful and in alignment with our belief about mediation is Situation-Behavior-Impact (SBI Model). To create an instructional model, modifications were made to this Center for Creative Leadership business model (2000) focused in the Behavior (**B**) and the Impact (**I**) components. In the Coaching 101 version of this model, the **B** represents the behavior of the teacher and the "I" represents the impact on the intended audience (teacher, student, staff, and parents). The SBI Model is a sequential model that allows for the coach to provide structured feedback.

### HOW FEEDBACK WORKS: AFTER THE CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

After a classroom observation, the coach now has a tool to provide a structured model for feedback. The "S" describes the situation, context or background of the observation in the classroom. (Who, what, when, where). The "B" describes the instructional behavior and actions of the teacher (using action verbs such as model, demonstrated, read aloud, discussed, described.) The "I" describes the impact of the instruction on the intended audience (specific data reflecting the students' engagement with the task.)

This model of feedback allows the coach to provide very precise, nonjudgmental feedback to the teacher. In turn, the teacher receives information about his/her teaching and its impact on the students' engagement and/or understanding of the content. Therefore, the impact is a result of the teacher's behavior. This

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connection is often missed by teachers and not discussed with coaches, thereby missing an opportunity to replicate effective strategies and discard ineffective strategies. The SBI structure provides the teacher with a roadmap for the intellectual work and reflection on practice that must take place in order for improvement. It is also an entry point for the coach to have a coaching conversation with the teacher. This enables the teacher to be an active participant rather than a passive recipient. Teachers will be given the feedback in the same template every time.

***This consistency moves the feedback from an external to an internal process where the teacher begins to mediate their own behavior, especially around impact.***

<b>SITUATION</b>
Yesterday in your third-hour 5th-grade Language Arts class with 28 students,
<b>BEHAVIOR</b>
You taught the 6 + 1 writing traits using a graphic organizer for the pre-writing stage.
<b>IMPACT</b>
I observed 25 of the 28 students completing the graphic organizer according to your instructions. Three students were drawing on the graphic organizer and not following your instructions.

“We frequently hear teachers talk about “how well the lesson went” without reference to what students were actually doing and what visible evidence there was as to what students actually knew as a consequence of the teaching. Mostly, the lesson has “gone well” when it has gone according to plan, without any specific reference to what students do or don’t know. Coaching 101 has situated the SBI structure in the instructional core through the coaching conversation.

Now the coach is ready to enter into a coaching conversation. After the feedback is given through a SBI, the coach poses an inquiry question which is an additional step to enter the conversation. Receiving feedback alone is not enough. Coaches engage the teacher in deep conversations about practice by posing an inquiry question to expand thinking, particularly around student work. For example, “What might be some hunches as to why your students have varying levels of understanding of photosynthesis?” By participating in coaching conversations about practice, teachers acquire valuable habits of mind that enable them to pursue such thinking on their own. Posing an inquiry question after the data has been given, invites the teacher to think beyond the current situation and consider options and possibilities. An inquiry question is a mediational question that expands thinking, invites multiples responses, and uncovers assumptions. The inquiry is the entry point to the coaching conversation. Therefore, Coaching 101 proposes the addition of another “I”—inquiry. Thus, we have an SBI(I) Situation, Behavior, Impact, Inquiry sequence. The addition of the “inquiry” question to the SBI structure extends the reach of the coaching conversation, and thus affords the teacher an opportunity to think deeply about their practice, the students’ learning, and the impact of their teacher moves and strategies, thereby extending their own learning. The result of this deeper learning and thinking is an improvement of student learning.

## HERE ARE SOME OF EXAMPLES OF THE SBI(I) SEQUENCE IN A COACHING CONVERSATION

“IF YOU RAISE THE LEVEL OF TEACHERS’ KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL IN GENERAL PEDAGOGY WITHOUT ANCHORING IT IN CONTENT, YOU GET HIGH-LEVEL PRACTICE DISCONNECTED FROM A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT STUDENTS ARE ACTUALLY LEARNING, AND FROM THE SPECIFIC ISSUES THAT STUDENTS HAVE WITH SPECIFIC COGNITIVE TASKS.”

ELMORE, 2008

The inquiry question lifts a teacher’s consciousness to their personal connection to the instructional core: teacher, student, content.

Over the past five years, educational coaches in Michigan have been using the Structured Model for Feedback (SBI (I)) with the instructional core as its foundation, to provide precise, neutral information to teachers regarding their practice. Our professional community of coaches are partners with teachers in supporting students and examining current instructional strategies to improve student achievement.

### FEEDBACK: BUILDING TRUST

In the coaching relationship, the first goal is to establish trust—trust in the process, trust in each other, and trust in the environment. Both parties in the coaching relationship need to trust and respect each other, realizing that neither person needs to be “fixed.” It’s all about the relationship. The educational coach holds high regard for the relationship between the student, teacher and content and is driven by the philosophy of unlimited capacity and the ability to continuously improve. Coaches believe that people have the inner

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BEHAVIOR
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IMPACT
I observed 25 of the 28 students completing the graphic organizer according to your instructions. Three students were drawing on the graphic organizer and not following your instructions.
INQUIRY QUESTION EXAMPLES
As you think about the 25 students that were engaged, what might be some reasons why they were successful in completing the task?
As you reflect on the 3 students who were not following your directions, what hunches do you have about why they were disengaged?
Understanding the complexity of the writing process, what ideas surface about how the delivery of the lesson met the needs of diverse learners?

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resources to achieve excellence. Increasingly, as the coach and teacher work together in a nonthreatening relationship, they realize the intent of this process is to grow intellectually, to learn more about learning, and to mutually increase their capacity for self-improvement. As a result, they begin to place their faith in the coaching process. Feedback is a natural extension of this mindset. Feedback is information, neither negative nor positive; it is simply information that helps us to improve. This consciousness allows for the coach to take a different stance, one of being available, listening actively, mediating, connecting, and providing nonjudgmental feedback for the transformation of teacher practice. Our structured model for feedback—Situation, Behavior, Impact, Inquiry (SBI(I))—is an integral part of the recipe for building trust.

### EXTENDING THE POWER OF FEEDBACK: TASK/PROCESS FEEDBACK VS. EGO-INVOLVING FEEDBACK

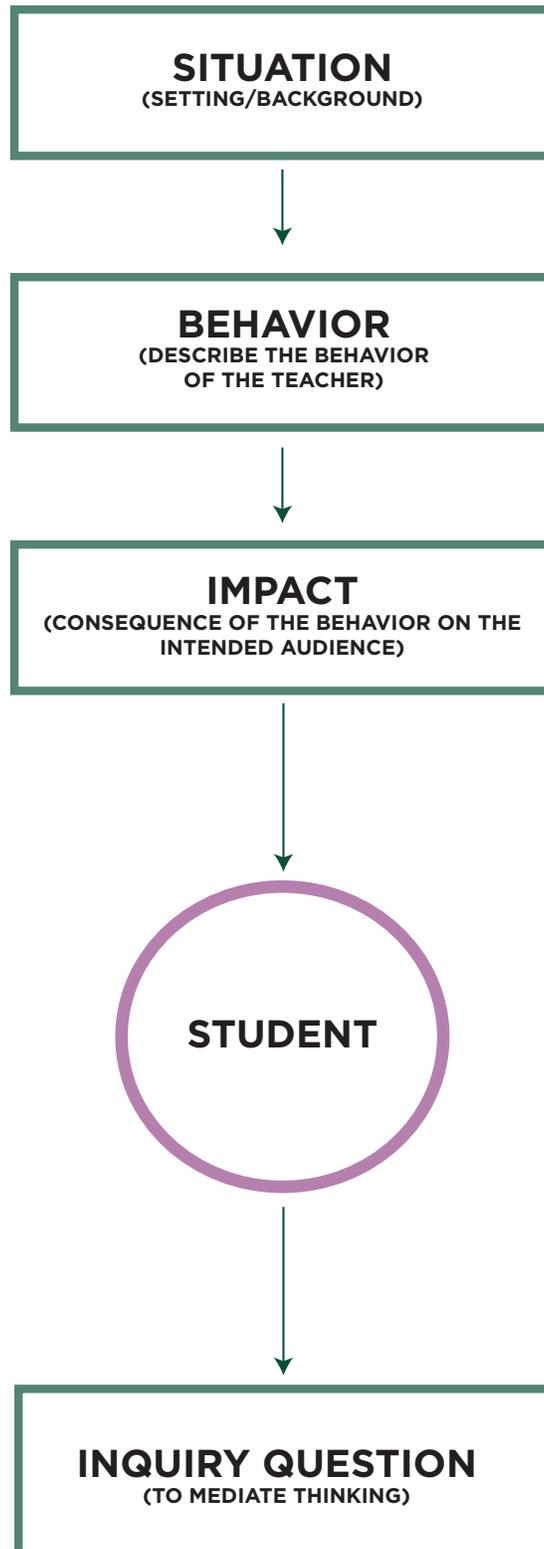
Both John Hattie and Dylan Wiliam remind us that feedback is effective when we are mindful of the type of response the feedback triggers in the recipient (Hattie & Wiliam, 2012). There are primarily two types of feedback—task/process feedback and ego-involving feedback. In task/process feedback, information or data is gathered around the specific teaching tasks of the teacher and/or student. This provides another opportunity for deeper reflection on the instructional core. The teacher might identify the impact and use of a specific instructional strategy, how students engaged in an instructional task, etc. When teachers and students are given task/process feedback, their response is to move to “thinking.” Thinking can be mediated in the coaching conversation. Inquiry questions can be shaped to explore intention of the teacher for selecting that strategy, the use and impact of the strategy by the students during the task, and the rigor of the content. Therefore, a myriad of opportunities to build the teacher’s instructional capacity is present.



Ego-involving feedback, on the other hand, is generally associated with a teacher’s general feelings or impressions about the lesson progress. It may call for subjective judgment without the benefit of data. Teachers and students who experience ego-involving feedback usually shut down on thinking and are not as receptive to inquiry questions. This limits the ability of the coach to mediate thinking and the session is less likely to lead to increased capacity for the teacher. Therefore, coaches can extend the use of SBI (I) as a structured approach by intentionally using task/process feedback in the SBI (I) structure and then following it with inquiry questions.

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**SBI(I) MODEL**



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