Section 1

Coaching: Before, During and After the Lesson

“Your goal as a coach is to develop your mentee into a self-reliant teacher. A self-reliant teacher is one who is able to generate and choose purposefully among viable alternatives, to act upon those choices, to monitor and reflect upon the consequences, and to modify and adjust in order to enhance student learning.

**Pre-Conference**

* + You should meet privately to discuss the upcoming lesson.
  + Your objective is to have your mentee express and clarify learning objectives, enhance teaching strategies, anticipate student behaviors, solidify plans for monitoring student learning, and consider ways to adjust instruction.
  + During this pre-visit conference your function is to ask probing questions in ways that will not only encourage your mentee to think of ideas to enrich the lesson plan, but will also provide him or her with the opportunity to gain confidence as a reflective educator. Suggestions to achieve these objectives are
    - Pick a **critical word or phrase** from your mentee’s reply to your questions and probe for more details.
    - Press for **specificity**. ‘What do you want to happen when you...?’ or ‘How will you know what students have learned and whether they can apply that learning?’ or ‘How would you feel if...?’
    - Be **patient**. Wait for an answer.
    - Acknowledge and **validate** answers by **restating** them in your own words.
    - **Avoid using judgmental phrases** such as ‘Wouldn’t it be better to...’ or ‘I can’t believe you expect that strategy to work.’
    - **Summarize** and acknowledge ideas, feelings, and decisions.

**The Lesson**

* + Record what is happening.
  + Resist the temptation to become a participant.
  + Focus on the extent to which quality learning takes place. Don’t just focus on what is wrong with the lesson.
  + Filter the visit with the information that you received from the pre-lesson visit.

**The Post-Conference**

* + Your goal is to encourage your mentee to assess the effectiveness of the lesson, to identify factors that contributed to and interfered with student learning, and to consider why he/she used alternative instructional strategies at times.
  + Share objective facts.
  + Keep your opinions to yourself.
  + Use questioning to foster conversation. Here are some examples:
    - How do you think the lesson went?
    - Why do you think it went the way it did?
    - How do you know that was the reason?
    - When you did this...the students reacted by...Why do you think that happened?
    - What did you expect would happen when...?
    - Were there any surprises?
* Help me understand what you took into account when planning this particular event.
* I noticed that you altered your prepared lesson plan during...
* If you could teach this lesson again, what, if anything, would you do differently? Why?
* What conclusions can you draw from teaching this lesson?
* When asking a question to elicit reflection, you need to be careful not to ask in a way that belittles your mentee.

**Show and Tell**

* At times, your wisest role as a mentor will be that of the experienced teacher.
* You show how it should be done when your mentee observes you teaching a lesson.
* You tell what you are going to do when you brief your mentee before the lesson.
* You share what you did during your meeting with the mentee after the lesson.

**The Question of Intervening**

* The first challenge is to decide the effect of intervening on the mentee’s confidence and relationship with the students against the possible damage likely to befall the students if you don’t intervene.
* The second challenge is to do so in a way that continues to support the mentee. You and your mentee will want to have some clear guidelines about what circumstances could lead you to intervene and how you will do it. (i.e. the safety of the students in the classroom.)
* Sometimes the act of intervening is undermining the mentee and diminishes the mentee’s authority with the students.
* It is possible to act to achieve a win-win solution.
* Communication with the mentee and at times with the students is essential to maintain a collegial relationship.

**Summary**

The function of coaching is to allow the mentee to clarify what, when, and how to teach; to reflect on the results of those decisions; and to develop and use alternatives that will improve upon past performances.” Text taken from Hal Portner, *Mentoring New Teachers*, Corwin Press, 2003.