

## Chapter 4

# Developing a Critical Stance Through Teacher Candidate Coaching

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter seeks to illustrate how one field-based professor used her instructional coaching knowledge and applied it in a field-based course to develop reflection and ultimately encourage teacher candidates to challenge themselves and take risks in their clinical placements. It reveals how approaches to teacher candidate coaching differ from traditional instructional coaching, which is focused on student outcomes, and how this coaching encourages teacher candidates to push themselves and think deeply about their emerging practice. Through an analysis of five coaching sessions, the use of effective coaching strategies that foster growth for the candidate were examined. The analysis of coaching as critical pedagogy is important to understand not only how the characteristics of dialogical conversations shape teacher candidates' goal choices, but also to situate the place of skilled feedback in the context of learning to teach.*

### INTRODUCTION

The journey to become a teacher educator began for me while I was a high school teacher when I was selected by my school district to become an instructional coach. Our school district hired consultants to implement a year-long professional development program to train teacher leaders in the theory behind Instructional Coaching (Fitterer, Harwood, Locklear, & Lapid, 2008) as well as in the use of a specific Teach for Success Classroom Observation Protocol (T4S, 2013) in order to improve rigor and engagement to improve student performance at our school. This professional development afforded me the opportunity to dig deep into pedagogy and practices used in the classroom in order to scaffold the growth of my colleagues through instructional coaching. The scaffolded professional development focused on all aspects of planning, teaching, and assessment through modules focused on student engagement, assessment

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practices, cognitive levels of questioning, instructional approaches, and learning environments (Fitterer, Harwood, Locklear, & Lapid, 2008). As an instructional coach, I was trained to use specific protocols for coaching and observation using an observation instrument to identify instructional attributes within a lesson (T4S, 2013). This experience changed my career. While I was often at odds with taking time from my own students in order to attend professional development and observe and coach my peers, the experience was transformational for me as an educator and inspired me to follow a path into graduate school with the goal of impacting teacher preparation through this type of targeted professional growth.

After graduate school, I was offered a position in a teacher preparation program with a strong regional reputation for preparing high-quality teachers, many of whom remain in the area to support the local school districts. The program offers extensive field-based experiences for the teacher candidates during their preparation, and my position embedded me, with my teacher candidates, in a local area partner school. In the semester prior to clinical teaching, the teacher candidates are placed in a classroom two days a week, and during that time I spanned the boundary from university to school sites to work alongside the teacher candidates to develop their pedagogical practices through seminar, lesson planning, observation, and coaching using an Instructional Coaching Protocol developed specifically to foster growth in this field placement (Tejeda-Delgado & Johnson, 2018). Teacher candidates are expected to use the experiences they have during this time, through both observation and teaching, to connect teaching, assessment and technology to their emerging practice. I served as a facilitator for their seminar, but more importantly, I spent time in their classroom observing their teaching and strengthening their impact with targeted, pedagogical goal setting connected to practice during one to one instructional coaching sessions. With instructional coaching as a passion that drives me as a teacher educator, this chapter explores how instructional coaching with teacher candidates fosters their pedagogical growth and challenges them to think critically about their instructional practices during their initial clinical experience.

## **BACKGROUND**

Instructional coaching, for classroom teachers, is an embedded form of professional development that is focused on individual teaching and learning needs with the goal of improving student outcomes (Fitterer, Harwood, Locklear, & Lapid, 2008; Heineke, 2013; Knight, 2009; Reddy, Dudek, & Lekwa, 2017). Instructional coaching is defined as a partnering to strengthen teaching through personalized, purposeful feedback that incorporates research-based strategies aimed at improving practice (Fitterer, Harwood, Locklear, & Lapid, 2008; Knight, 2009; Sharpin, Garth, & Kehrwald, 2017). Through the integration of evidence-based practices that focus on content planning, formative assessment, specific instructional practices, and building community in the classroom, coaches working with classroom teachers collaborate toward meeting the goals of the classroom teacher (Knight, 2009; Van Nieuwerburgh, 2017). Models of instructional coaching cycles share key components including feedback on instruction, dialectical conversations, and goal setting (Artman-Meeker, 2015; Bean, Draper, Hall, Vandermolen, & Zigmond, 2010; Conner, 2017; Costa & Gramston, 2002; Crawford, Zucker, Van Horne, & Landry, 2017; Desimone & Pak, 2016; Drake, 2016; Gardiner & Weisling, 2016; Sharplin, Kherwald & Garth, 2017; Tejeda-Delgado & Johnson, 2018). Instructional coaching is often focused on classroom teachers, and rooted in school improvement efforts, and instructional coaches draw upon their own classroom experience and leadership to deliver instructional coaching to their peers.

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