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# REFLECTING ON MENTORING AND COACHING IN MY WORK

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## Introduction

"Mentors who become students of their own experience use reflection to inform what it is they do and how they do it" (Zachary, 2000, p. xv). Reflection informs the content of my mentoring of others; reflection also informs the skills and methods used in mentoring.

In this reflection, I consider the ways that I use mentoring and coaching skills in my workplace. Connections are made to research and theory within my practice. I begin with definitions and an explanation for a heavier focus on mentoring over coaching. Next I reflect on my mentoring experience and practice in several contexts. Finally, I consider coaching and possible future learning directions.

## Definitions of Mentoring and Coaching

The research includes several potential definitions of mentoring. Mertz (2004) suggests that mentoring is atop a pyramid with role model, coach, advisor, sponsor, and protector below. This definition suggests that coaching is a subset of mentoring. His definition also includes the concept of career advancement as the highest level of intent in a mentoring relationship. However, Shea (2002) suggests that "the traditional career-orientation definition of mentoring, while important, is seen as too limiting today" (p. 7). Instead Shea (2002) suggests that mentoring should go beyond obligatory relationships.

Zachary (2000) believes that "learning is the fundamental process and the primary purpose of mentoring" (p. 1). In this view of mentoring, the mentoring experience should

be “consciously and conscientiously grounded in learning” for the satisfaction of both mentor and mentee (Zachary, 2002, p. xv).

Coaching, on the other hand, generally has a shorter duration and is more structure than mentoring. The focus of the coaching is generally on the performance of the person, and there is a specific agenda for immediate goals. The relationship has a set duration from the outset of the relationship. The coach has influence because of their position as a coach, and often the coach may not have direct experience with the client’s specific role (Brefi, 2009; Starcevich, 2009). Coaching is a little closer to counseling due to the focus on the person’s goals and strategies to achieve those goals (Brefi, 2009; Orem, 2008). In addition, coaches tend to be professionals and are from outside of the organization (Bloom et al., 2005).

Because I work in educational technology, where constant learning occurs, the learning definition of mentoring appeals to me and applies more to my work. I lean more towards mentoring because of the focus on learning and teaching. I am not as comfortable with coaching in the mode of asking questions to guide the person into clarifying their views, values, goals, and strategies. Therefore, this reflection includes more reflection on mentoring than coaching.

## Why Mentor?

Two theories of interpersonal relationships may explain why a person might want to be a mentor. Social exchange theory suggests that there are costs and benefits in relationships, and therefore someone intending to be a mentor sees a benefit to outweigh the costs. Communitarianism balances individual rights with that of the community, and under this theory, mentors may intend to contribute to the wider community. Allen and Eby (2003) suggest reference Kram (1985) suggesting that a reward of mentorship is to

shape the other person to see characteristics of themselves in that person. Mentors desire to create a mirror image of themselves to fulfill generativity needs (Allen & Eby, 2003).

Personally, I consider those who have mentored me, and that motivates me to want to mentor others and to contribute to the community and create additional videoconference leaders in the field. Within these mentoring relationships, we are always learning new strategies, new training tips, new resources, new technology tools, and new videoconference project formats from each other. In addition, all of my mentoring has been voluntary or "informal" mentoring (Allen & Eby, 2003). The benefits to these mentoring relationships tends to be more videoconferences for my schools. As I know more people across the United States and globally, these relationships result in extended opportunities and classrooms for my teachers in Berrien and Cass counties to connect with for engaging learning experiences. In most of my mentoring experiences, the learning in two-way, as suggested as important by Zachary (2000). I learn new technology tools, new ways to facilitate videoconferences, new ways to teach best practices to our schools.

Some mentors prefer to mentor someone they see as similar to themselves. However, in a mentor relationship of  a longer duration, perceived similarity is not as important for the mentor's sense of benefit from the relationship (Allen & Eby, 2003). I do find that there are marked similarities among those who mentor me and whom I mentor. We all have a passion for education. We are all dedicated to bringing quality learning experiences to students. We all have a collaborative, giving, sharing spirit. We all believe in constructivist learning. We all believe in life-long learning. We keep learning ourselves. We all like to create programs and events for students. Most of us use online technology tools such as Twitter and Skype to continue the mentoring

relationships via distance throughout the school year. Allen and Eby (2003) suggest that mentors have generativity needs, and I definitely do want to see these characteristics replicated in others so that curriculum videoconferencing can be expanded throughout the world.

## Mentor Models

People tend to learn mentoring from those who have mentored them (Gibson et al., 2000). In addition, Kouzes and Posner (1996) suggest that there are many ways that others nurture our growth and learning as leaders. This is certainly true in my life. My first boss, Jim Bemembek, was an incredible mentor and leader. He toughened me up; he challenged me to try new things. He gave me amazing opportunities. He encouraged me to increase my "statewide presence" and then my national presence. He taught me how to write grants and how to support the districts we serve. In addition, I continue to learn from other people who are my mentors. Jim Bembenek was one of my more important mentors as I learned to lead the districts in implementation of instructional technology. Sue Porter, who co-founded TWICE, Michigan's K12 videoconferencing organization with me, has also mentored me in leadership and best practices throughout the years. Arnie Comer, longtime president of TWICE, has mentored me in relating to others, leading committees, and managing events for schools. Finally, Roxanne, who I mentored early in our relationship, now mentors me as well. She pushes me to understand the theory and research behind best practices and to articulate reasons to others.

## Mentoring My Local Videoconference Coordinators

In my work an Instructional Technology Consultant, I support 70 schools in 22 school districts in Berrien and Cass counties who have videoconferencing systems. Each

school has one or two people who are the designated videoconference contact person in their school. They provide support to the teachers who use videoconferencing to enhance their curriculum by connecting to authors, scientists, experts, and peer classrooms globally. Part of my job is to train and support the coordinators as they support the teachers in the use of videoconferencing. As I learned about mentoring, I realized that my work in supporting them could be considered mentoring, and in some situations coaching.

Mertz (2004) proposes a conceptual model for mentoring that includes two main concepts of intent and involvement. Intent is the perceived purpose of the activity and the involvement is the amount of time & effort required. She suggests that a distinction should be made between career advancement mentoring and professional development mentoring. Supporting videoconference coordinators is more like professional development than career advancement, as the support of videoconferencing doesn't necessarily create a career ladder.

At the bottom level of intent is the role model or supporter. I role model best practice in videoconferencing for my coordinators. I also support them by providing resources, tools, training, and ideas for promoting videoconferencing in their school. The second level is that of teacher or coach. I teach my coordinators in formal workshops and also through just-in-time-training when they call with a question, or dial in my videoconferencing system to practice. The training and coaching includes assisting the coordinators with scheduling, how to participate in programs, how to find partners for collaborations, how to support teachers, and how to troubleshoot videoconferences. The third level is that of advisor or guide. As advisor and guide, I informally assess my coordinators skills and stress level, and encourage them to learn new skills as

appropriate. I share strategies that have worked for other coordinators, and provide tips on supporting videoconferencing in their school. The last three levels of intent in the model are sponsor, patron, and mentor at the very top (Mertz, 2004). In these situations, the mentor is assisting the mentee with career advancement. As already indicated, this application of mentoring does not apply to my work with my videoconference coordinators.

The second portion of Mertz' model addresses the level of involvement. In my case, the level of involvement is affected by the fact that I support about 100 videoconference coordinators. Some of them call me on a regular basis for advice and feedback, and others I have to initiate contact. These factors affect the levels of involvement. In level 1 and 2, the mentor is giving advice, providing guidance, and lending a friendly ear. I definitely do this often, especially with those who call me. Sometimes when I know there is an issue I make a point to set up a videoconference or phone call to discuss further. Other times the coordinator needs to vent about the challenges they face in their schools. At levels 3 and 4 of involvement, the mentor is sharing information, monitoring progress, advising to gain tenure (in Mertz' view) (Mertz, 2004). While I don't have a formal relationship with my videoconference coordinators, in the last three years, half of them were under grant requirements to make progress in implementing videoconferencing in their school. In these cases, I had more opportunity to monitor progress and to share information to increase the use of videoconferencing in their school or to address problems. Finally, at levels 5 & 6 of involvement, the mentors use their networks, reputation, power and influence to support the mentee for advancement. While my videoconference coordinators are not "advancing" in their career per se, I have used my networks and influence to assist them

in finding partner schools and classes for videoconferences for their students. In addition, a few coordinators talk to me often enough to approach this level of involvement. They want to report on their progress and vent. I often encourage them in their successful support in their schools and nudge them to learn the next level of skills by sharing the responsibility for test calls and scheduling so they can learn more.

Mertz's model of involvement and intent with mentors (2004) clarified the various potential roles and activities of mentors in light of my work in mentoring my videoconferencing. Next, mentoring concepts can be applied to my videoconference coordinators as they work with teachers to integrate videoconferencing in the curriculum.

## Helping Videoconference Coordinators Mentor Teachers

One of the new ways that I am applying my newfound knowledge on mentoring is considering how my videoconference coordinators mentor teachers in using videoconferencing in their curriculum. A qualitative study (Fairbanks et al., 2000) was done on the mentoring relationship between the student teacher and the mentor teacher. The authors reference Britzman (1991) that learning to teach is a social process where the student teachers sort through the contradictions between the pedagogical knowledge they learned and the realities of teaching. The authors also make connections between mentoring and situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 2005). Three main categories of assistance and mentoring that occurred during the student teacher / mentor teacher relationship. The mentor teachers helped student teachers survive their beginning teaching experiences and define their teaching lives. The mentor teachers established relationships based on dialogue and reflection. In this dialogue the two teachers negotiated with each other, found the balance between leading and following, and articulated teaching craft knowledge. Third, the two teachers built

professional partnerships  by partnering to teach a lesson and developing new curriculum together. They ended the relationship more as a team than as a mentor / student relationship.

Similarly, where my videoconference coordinators are working well with teachers, they follow a similar pattern of growth in the relationship. At first, the videoconference coordinator, if she has a teaching background, often leads the lessons. The coordinator chooses the program based on the teacher's curriculum and completes the registration process. Then often the coordinator assists in preparing the students for the videoconference. Finally, depending on the coordinator's job in the school, and if possible, she stays in the room during the videoconference to help run the camera and assist with facilitating the dialogue.

After a few programs this way, the partnership moves to more dialogue and reflection. The teacher may begin to be interested in participating in the process, or the coordinator may nudge the teacher towards doing more of the work. The coordinator negotiates with the teacher and starts to encourage the teacher to participate in the process, and finds a balance between leading and following, starting to let the teacher take the lead. The coordinator also articulates knowledge about VC: how to sign up, how to prepare students, how to use the remote to mute the microphone and use camera presets.

Finally and ideally, the videoconference coordinator and the teachers move to a professional partnership. The teacher and the videoconference coordinator plan lessons together and create new curriculum or collaborative projects. The coordinator moves into a "supporting" role instead of a "promoting" role.

In another study, the pre-service teachers assisted their mentor teacher with technology integration, and the mentor teacher took the lead with the curriculum (Margerum-Leys & Marx, 2004). This qualitative study examined the mentor relationship between a student teacher and her mentor teacher, in the light of teacher knowledge (content, pedagogical, and pedagogical content knowledge), and the use and application of educational technology.

> Educational technology is an area in which mentor teachers are eager to access content knowledge held by student students. … They also perceive that student teachers' teacher education coursework will have contained more educational technology information than their own coursework (p. 423).

The heart of the mentoring relationship was that student teacher and mentor teacher learn from each other, and sharing knowledge about educational technology creates professional development on both sides of the relationship. In several example scenarios shared, one modeled a lesson for the other, and the other then taught that same lesson in later periods (it was a middle school with 5 sections). Sometimes the student teacher took the lead with a new technology tool, and sometimes the mentor teacher took the lead. The mentored each other throughout the process.

This same type of partnership can occur with the videoconference coordinator. I plan to incorporate some of these principles and possible ways of working in my workshops for my videoconference coordinators. I think they would be scared off by a formal mentor training, but the principles can be applied to their situation. Zachary (2000) suggests several strategies for mentors to facilitate learning including asking questions, reformulating statements, summarizing the learning, listening for silence, and listening reflectively. In addition, the challenges of playing a dual role of teacher or media specialist and videoconference coordinator / mentor are important to discuss with my videoconference coordinators. Some challenges that they may face as the mentor in

videoconferencing are described by Orland-Barak (2005). Teacher coordinators might find it difficult to implement videoconferencing in their own class while trying to mentor novice teachers in the same thing. They may have a conflicting dual sense of accountability to teachers and principals/inspectors. It maybe be difficult to make sense of being a mentor and being a teacher and differing behaviors for each. They might believe in mentoring as "collaborative and democratic," but find their actions were more "prescriptive and controlling." They might be an expert in teaching and integrating technology, but a novice in mentoring, which causes dissonance (Orland-Barak, 2005).

Training to address these challenge would include increasing the coordinators confidence in themselves and their profession, their ability to develop relationships with teachers, their ability to understand the "power relationships with new accountabilities", and a clear vision of what it means to be a good professional in changing contexts (Orland-Barak, 2005). These are not easy to address, but starting a conversation or raising awareness of competing expectations may be helpful for my videoconference coordinators.

## Mentoring with the "Jazz" Workshop

Mentoring for learning has striking similarities with situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 2005). In this section, I describe the "Jazz" workshop and how facilitators are mentored in the process of conducting the workshop. I also show the connections to situated learning.

123 VC: Jazzing Up Your Curriculum with Videoconferencing is a grassroots collaborative learning community that began in 2005. Ken Conn and Bennie Tschoerner, members of the Texas Distance Learning Association, invited me to participate in a week long workshop on videoconferencing and collaborative learning tools. Since that humble

beginning, the learning community has grown to encompass three weeks of workshops with 3 countries, 5 time zones, 5 lead facilitators, 24 locations, and about 300 participants in the summer of 2009.

The "Jazz Workshop," as affectionately nicknamed by the participants and facilitators, is a unique blend of collaboration and constructivist learning, mediated by videoconferencing and Web 2.0 tools. The workshop includes time for local training on collaboration tools and videoconference resources, simulations, guest speakers, and small group time as shown in Figure 1. In the simulations, participants role play students

Figure 1

| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 hour | Local Web 2.0 and Videoconference resource instruction | | | | |
| 2 hours | Simulations of collaborative videoconference formats such as Read Around the Planet, Monster Match, Math Marvels, MysteryQuest, and the ASK program.<br>4 locations meet together for simulations. | | | | Group Presentations |
| 1 hour | Lunch and local instruction | | | | Grand finale celebration |
| 1 hour | Guest speakers, featured zoos and museums that offer videoconference content.<br>8 locations meet together for guest speakers. | | | | |
| 30 min | Local reflection time | | | | |
| 1 hour | Small group planning time with groups created across state borders.<br>4 locations split into 8-12 point to point videoconferences. | | | | |
| 30 min | Reflection blogging | | | | |

experiencing popular videoconference formats such as Read Around the Planet, a celebration of reading; Monster Match, a descriptive writing exchange; MysteryQuest, a geography game; and the ASK literature based program where students interview an author or specialist. The guest speakers include videoconference content providers such

as zoos, museums, and other organizations who offer quality lessons to schools. During small group time, four to six teachers at two locations meet to plan a videoconference collaboration that meets their curriculum goals. Throughout the week, participants learn to implement videoconferencing and collaborative tools into their curriculum.

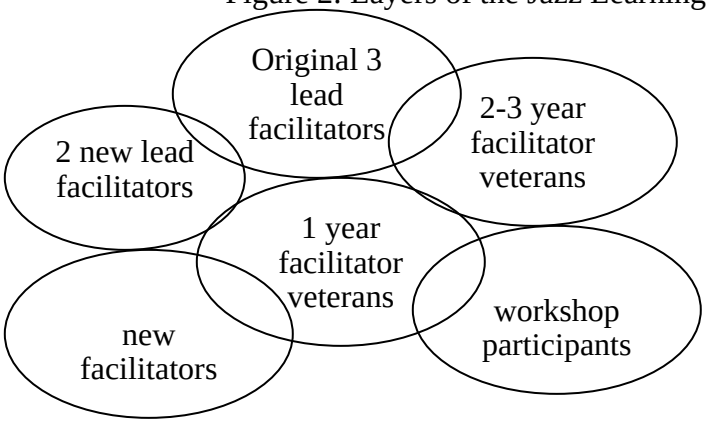
Lave and Wenger (2005) describe learning within a situation, within a community, as situated learning. A key component of situated learning is “legitimate peripheral participation”, which means that newcomers to a world of knowledge or skill begin by participating with an old-timer (expert learner), and by virtue of that peripheral participation they grow to become an old-timer. The peripheral participation is legitimate in that the relationship is either formalized (i.e. apprentice) or informally understood by expert and newcomer. This framework of situated learning for learning communities uniquely applies to the “Jazz workshop”. The concept of expert learning and apprentice is similar to the mentor and mentee relationship.

To support the Jazz workshop, 5 lead facilitators each mentor a group of 3-4 facilitators. The lead facilitators organize the activities, delegate tasks such as leading a simulation, preparing materials, and mentor the facilitators in best practice. The work of preparing for the workshop and delivering the workshop is accomplished together. This way the newcomers have “access” to the old-timers and learning occurs as the work is accomplished. Preparation for the workshop includes several meetings beforehand where we walk through the each part of the workshop. During the workshop, newcomers may lead a section, with the lead facilitator on hand in case questions arise. After each day, the facilitators debrief with their lead facilitator. As we talk through how the day went, each facilitator is learning, reflecting, and refining their training practice. All of this

mentoring and working together occurs via distance, so creating the relationship amongst the facilitators is important to the mentoring process (Zachary, 2000).

Lave and Wenger (2005) suggest that in a learning community, there is a set of relations between the newcomers and old-timers through the cycles of learning. “The community of practice encompasses apprentices, young masters with apprentices, and masters some of whose apprentices have themselves become masters” (p. 57). The learning occurs across the layers of relationships, between near-peers, and across learning cycles (See Figure 2). Within the Jazz Workshop, the knowledgeable skills in facilitation, technology training, and collaborative technology tools move in and across each circle of learning. Everyone contributes to the continual improvement of the workshop and therefore our continued practice of implementing videoconferencing in the curriculum. This learner between novice and the expert and among novices is similar to the mentor teacher and student teacher relationship (Butler & Chao, 2001; Fairbanks et al., 2000; Margerum-Leys & Marx, 2004; Smith & Robinson, 2003).

Figure 2: Layers of the Jazz Learning Community




Another key component of legitimate peripheral participation is that participation is at first partial, and grows in scope and complexity, similar to the growth in the learning

relationship between the mentor teacher and the student teacher (Fairbanks et al., 2000). A new facilitator often is overwhelmed with the complexity of the workshop and the details to notice. The lead facilitator at first gives the new facilitator simple tasks, such as an introduction to a simulation or a debrief of a simulation using a PowerPoint overview already created. As the new facilitator gains in skill, and relationship builds that the lead facilitators see the skills, the facilitator begins to contribute knowledge, handouts, resources, to improve the quality of the workshop. As they learn the components of the Jazz workshop, they learn the culture of Jazz, the ways we integrate videoconferencing in the curriculum, and the foundational beliefs of constructivist learning and collaboration.

In the first year of facilitating Jazz, the newcomer is getting the big picture or broad view of what the workshop is all about. They have strong goals to learn how the workshop runs. Yet after they have the big picture, the learning can occur rapidly between peers and near-peers as the facilitators compare notes and learn professional development techniques from each other. Lave and Wenger suggest that the effectiveness of the circulation of knowledge among peers may be a condition for the effectiveness of learning (Lave & Wenger, 2005, p. 93). Web 2.0 tools such as Skype chat, facilitator blogs, running conversations throughout the year on Twitter all contribute to the circulation of information and knowledge within the Jazz learning community.

Mentoring and situated learning within the Jazz workshop are informal and usually unstated. Lead facilitators are expected to build a relationship with the facilitators in their group during preparation and implementation of the workshop. The mentoring conversations occur mostly during the daily debrief sessions as the facilitators discuss what went well and how to facilitate the workshop the next day. Mentoring of new lead facilitators is slightly more explicit, as two of the lead facilitators have taken on the

responsibility of checking in regularly with new lead facilitators. This regular meeting time follows the points of connection in providing multiple ways to communicate (phone, Skype, email, and videoconferencing), setting a daily meeting, and sharing (Zachary, 2000).

## Mentoring in an Online Class

One of my online classes is called Kid2Kid Videoconference Connections. In this six week online course, the participants are mentored through the process of making a collaborative videoconference project happen. During the course, the participants are supported with resources, conversation, phone calls, and videoconferences as needed to assist the participant in their work.

Zachary (2000) suggests connections between mentoring and adult learning theory (Knowles, 1980). These connections apply to my class as well. Where adults learn best when they are involved in diagnosing, planning, implementing, and evaluating their own learning, the mentee serves as an active partner in the learning process. In my class, the participants choose their project, and plan and implement the videoconference, finally evaluating the process and the result.

The mentor is a facilitator, as the facilitator for adult learning creates and maintains a supportive climate that promotes the conditions necessary for learning to take place. In the online class, I provide supports, resources, and a friendly learning environment so that participants can take control of their learning. As needed, I mentor them in the process, facilitating their learning by asking questions, providing suggestions, and encouraging the participants. Adult learners also need the see an immediate application of their learning, and mentors can provide multiple connections to the real

world. In the course, the participants are applying their learning in their classroom throughout the duration of the course.

Where adult learners prefer to be self-directed, the mentee takes responsibility for learning. Mentoring is determined by goals, as adult learners' readiness for learning increases when they have a need to know. Similarly, in my online class, as the participants are ready for knowledge and resources related to the stage of their videoconference project, the resources are available. If they do not have a need to know, they can skip those resources until they are ready. In addition, adults are most successful in learning when they are internally motivated to learning. The course provides ample opportunity for them to build on their motivation for learning.

## Mentoring Videoconferencing Leaders

"It has been argued that leaders are not evaluated based on the number of followers they lead, but instead on the number of new leaders they develop (Wheatley, 1999) quoted in Gibson et al. (2000). I hadn't thought about mentoring this way until my reading for this competency. But on reflection, I see ways that I am mentoring new leaders in videoconferencing. For example, when I first started blogging about videoconferencing in 2005, no one else was blogging about educational videoconferencing. Now I have encouraged more than 15 videoconference professionals across the country to start blogging about videoconferencing.

One person in particular has grown to be a national videoconference leader and now we mentor each other. In 2005, Roxanne searched the Internet and found me. She took my online courses and joined the Jazz workshop mentioned earlier. We talk via Skype regularly during the school year, videoconference at least once a week, and share videoconference programs and collaborations among our schools. We continue

conversations across our blogs, via Twitter, and even evening phone calls. Sometimes we talk about specific issues that concern her support of videoconferencing in her schools. Sometimes she calls for a coaching session and I ask questions to help her process the issue (Bloom et al., 2005). In the spring 2008, I was delighted when another colleague in Texas excitedly told me at a conference, "We have a 'Janine' in Texas! Her name is Roxanne!" In the summer of 2009, I was unable to attend the National Educational Computing Conference, and I was pleased to see Roxanne join the International Society for Technology in Education IVC Special Interest Group leadership team. Our relationship has grown to the mentoring occurring both directions. We learn from each other. We even team blogged a 20 Day Challenge to Becoming a Better Videoconference Coordinator. The benefits of mentoring in contributing to the community and generativity are clear in our relationship (Allen & Eby, 2003). Gibson et. al (2000) share this beautiful description of a dance of learning:

> A master is defined as someone who started before the learner (Zukav, 1979, 1990) In the ancient tradition the job of the master is not to teach, but to dance with the learner. In this sense the master is following the learner's path of inquiry by presenting only the information that is asked for by the learner. The master begins this dance with the essence of the knowledge, the core of what there is to know and builds outward from that core in directions driven by the learner (p. 61).

The learning and mentoring between Roxanne and I fits this description neatly.

In a lesser degree, I have mentored others in the support of videoconferencing in their area. Steve, a videoconference coordinator in Wales, and I have met regularly for three years, and their program is now so strong that I am unable to find enough of my own classes to partner with them for videoconference projects. They are now able to find American classes on their own for collaborations. Some of the Jazz facilitators have grown this way as part of the Jazz relationships built and continued throughout the school year. Gibson et. al. (Gibson et al., 2000) suggest that leaders nowadays are "coaches,

facilitators, and team leaders." One of the most potent ways to influence someone is to mentor them. The variety of ways of mentoring are usually related to the goals of the organization. Informal mentoring could include teams and luncheons, but also the continuous online conversation in a community of practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that a community of practice is "an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities" (p. 98). The Jazz workshop is a community of practice around videoconferencing and collaboration. We have a shared vision of using videoconferencing to connect students for meaningful learning and collaboration. Instead of transmitting this vision through traditional acquisition of knowledge via instruction, "learning occurs through centripetal participation in the learning curriculum of the ambient community" (p. 100). Participants and new facilitators alike have access to the community of practice, and the thinking out-loud of the community leaders via their blogs, the videoconference programs they share, and via microblogging on Twitter. This online community continues the mentorship and learning throughout the school year.

## Thinking about Coaching and Improving My Practice

In my reading about coaching, I found much of the conversation unfamiliar and new. I have gained a new awareness of how coaches work (Goldsmith et al., 2000; O'Neill, 2000; Orem, 2008), yet the method of coaching seems beyond my current position and skill. My understanding of coaching is still in the awareness stage, with little application to my work. Bloom et. al. (2005) provide a description of coaching principals that connects somewhat to my understanding. Coaching, in their view, is a way to provide intensive, individualized professional development to principals. A definition they recommend is the following:

> A coach is someone who (1) sees what others may not see through the high quality of his or her attention or listening, (2) is in the position to step back (or invite participants to step back) from the situation so that they have enough distance from it to get some perspective, (3) helps people see the difference between their intentions and their thinking or actions, and (4) helps people cut through patterns of illusion and self-deception caused by defensive thinking and behavior. Robert Hargrove, author of *Masterful Coaching* in (Bloom et al., 2005, p. 1).

The focus is on questioning and listening, which seems different than facilitating learning in the mentoring literature listed above. It sounds more like counseling, and therefore is foreign to my thinking. However, I will here consider some of the principles from Bloom's work and how they might affect my practice.

Early in the first chapter, Bloom et. al. (2005) tell the story of learning to fly a plane, and the flight instructor said nothing when an error was made. Instead, when asked, he suggested where to look for the problem. This idea is not my typical behavior. I tend to do a lot of instruction and sharing of information. Asking more questions, and letting the process evolve further before intervening may be a new skill to integrate in my practice. A whole chapter is dedicated to the skills of listening, observing, and questioning. Coaches are encouraged to listen to words to separate assertions and assessments and encourage the coachee to determine which are well grounded and which may not be based in fact. Coaches are encouraged to observe emotion and mood to gain insight into the experience of the coachee. Coaches should listen to their listening and quiet their inner voice to really hear and observe the coachee. Finally, coaches should ask open ended questions, questions that invite further sharing, questions that are neutrally biased, and questions that challenge assessments and assumptions.

Later, when describing facilitative coaching, five moves are given as strategies (Bloom et al., 2005). The five moves are paraphrasing, asking clarifying questions, paraphrasing with interpretation, asking meditational questions, and providing

summarizing statements. These methods assist the coachee in hearing their words reframed, and summarizing the discussion. In addition, the suggestions from instructional coaching are helpful for my informal mentoring as well. War stories put coachees on the defensive and should be avoided. Before giving instruction, ask for permission. Couch the instructional language in neutral ways and avoid using "I" even when your experience is applicable in the situation. These concepts are far from what I currently do, and I will attempt to implement these suggestions in my informal mentoring to see what the effects are.

I know already that my listening and relationship skills are not a strong point. My strengths lie in the executing and strategic thinking domains, with none of them in the influencing or relationship building domains (Rath & Conchie, 2008). While the Strengths Finder concept encourages only building on strengths and ignoring weaknesses, I would like to improve my listening and questioning skills. Instead of giving advice and suggestions so quickly, I am sure it would be a benefit to listen more and ask more questions. Implementing these suggestions will bring some coaching skills to my practice and hopefully improve my interactions with those in my circle of influence.

## Future Learning

I realize that I have just scratched the surface of the mentoring and coaching fields. I have been started on a journey of improving my own mentoring and coaching skills. Yet another level of mentoring and coaching is developing formal mentoring and coaching programs (Bloom et al., 2005; Murray, 2001). Potential places to establish formal programs include my videoconference coordinators mentoring each other and/or the teachers in their schools or setting up a structure for student technology mentors

(Butler & Chao, 2001). Formalizing the mentoring in the Jazz workshop may improve the quality of learning that occurs and provide additional lead facilitators as the workshop collaboration continues to grow. My learning in this competency hints at the vast field of mentoring and coaching and all the attendant possibilities for application to my work.

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