

Coaching Journal

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1st Session: February 12, 2014

Strategies:

Centennial Place (and all APS schools) are closed during the week due to inclement weather. I received a phone call about 1:00pm from Ms. T asking whether I could help her set up an online book discussion about *Because of Winn Dixie* (DiCamillo, 2000) with her 4th grade students, all of whom are reading the book. We had been talking about *Edmodo* at school last week, so she wondered if it would work for that. I explained how I had used *Edmodo* with my Helen Ruffin Reading Bowl team for discussions, as well as quizzes and sharing reading logs, and that I agreed it would be a great idea to try it. Several of her students had been on the HRRB team and already had *Edmodo* accounts. I asked her how she was going to get the students to log in; we hadn't talked with them since seeing them at school a couple days earlier. Since she uses [Remind101](#) to communicate with parents, she said she could send students' parents a text with the *Edmodo* group code and URL and tell them to sign up for an online discussion to take place at 6-7pm. While we were on the phone, I logged into *Edmodo* and talked her through creating a group for her 1st period ELA class. I also talked her through posting discussion notes, and joined the group (she made me a co-teacher). Then we talked about how best to approach the activity. I suggested that she should think of a few simple questions about the book and post those first for all students to respond to as practice, and suggested that her first post this evening should lay some ground rules about discussion, remind students to answer in complete sentences and remember to be respectful and polite. I also suggested that she turn off the Moderation setting so that kids could respond to each other in real time – since we'd be online with them, we could easily step in if someone didn't behave responsibly. We chatted until almost 2:30pm getting the details worked out for the book discussion.

About an hour later, Ms. T called me back to say that 10 kids had already signed up and wanted to know what time the discussion would start! They were all waiting online, and started answering the questions (apparently everyone was bored with Snow Days). She told them on *Edmodo* to calm down and we would all meet at 6PM. I joined the discussion at 6pm; 14 kids signed in for the actual book discussion. They posted lots of thoughtful comments, answered and asked each other questions about the story, and generally had a delightful discussion. They didn't want to quit! While we were online I also reminded kids to "refresh" their screens regularly, and answered some of their "tech support"- type questions individually.

Ms. T and I talked several times later on the phone, on Facebook and *Edmodo* about what went well with the discussion and what she might have done differently – especially arranging future discussions in advance instead of at the last minute to get more kids involved. Another problem we learned about later was that apparently several kids couldn't participate because their electricity was off due to the storm, which is a concern to keep in mind when using planning to use online activities during inclement weather. This experience illustrated the strategy of peer coaching described in *Technology, Coaching and Community* (ISTE, 2012) in which the teacher's need for assistance and support drove her to seek assistance of another teacher who is more experienced with a particular technology use. Our established partner relationship makes it easy for us to work together to tackle shared instructional challenges.

Skill and Affective Changes:

Ms. T is completely smitten with using *Edmodo*! The online discussion went well, and she later received e-mails from parents raving about how engaged their kids were during the activity. We will explore additional ways to use *Edmodo* with other groups of students when we return to school. Ms. T is energetic and interested in trying all kinds of new technology tools that her students will learn from. She is already familiar with other technology tools like Remind101, so productivity and communication tools are easy for her.

Reflection on Challenges and Solution:

I felt this coaching session was both easy and challenging. It was easy for me, because Ms. T and I have a strong personal relationship (she didn't hesitate to call me at home on my cellphone) and frequently collaborate for instruction. However, it was challenging because we were on the phone, both logged in to *Edmodo*, and I had to talk her through the steps and be sure I was giving clear instructions. That part was more difficult because we weren't in the same room. We had a very collegial discussion about strategies and procedures for the activity, both of us suggesting strategies and solutions, which further demonstrated the importance of our partner relationship.

2nd Session: March 4, 2014 (11:00am-12:00pm)**Strategies:**

Today I spent an hour in Ms. T's classroom observing one of her language arts lessons. Ms. T is an inspired and energetic 4th grade teacher; because our school's instruction is departmentalized at 4th grade she is the English Language Arts/Reading instructor for the entire grade, with each class participating in 50 minutes of daily instruction. She teaches 74 4th grade students every day. Today's lesson was whole-group instruction for 21 students to introduce a new concept (homophones and homographs) and review metaphors and similes. After reviewing the objectives for the lesson Ms. T led students in call-and-response style "I Can" statements: "I can correctly use homophones." "I can identify a metaphor when I read it." She introduced the concepts with a picture book, *How much can a bare bear bear?* (Cleary, 2005) which engaged students in rhythm and rhyme, reinforcing earlier poetry instruction. Ms. T was assisted during this and subsequent classes by our interrelated teacher who works specifically with students with disabilities in a push-in model. Ms. T was using a direct instruction approach in the beginning of the lesson with student interaction toward the end. She used a telephone as an analogy for a homophone when explaining the concept. Students had a worksheet on which they were identifying pairs of homophones or homographs, which they then discussed. Ms. T encouraged students to help each other as needed. At the end of the lesson, Ms. T reviewed the concepts and wrapped up with call-and-response, "Get it?" "Got It!" "Good." I noticed that she had desks arranged in 3 long rows of 7 desks each, which was different from the arrangement I had seen previously in her classroom. However, it seemed to work for whole group instructions. After the lesson, she asked me what I thought and if I had any suggestions. In response to my question later about how students would practice this knowledge, she said the use of figurative language was included as one of the requirements for their final writing project, and that they had been noting and discussing it frequently while reading *Because of Winn Dixie* together in class.

Ms. T is an amazing teacher. However, she is challenged by technology issues. Her classroom has only 4 desktop computers for students to use, but each section that she teaches has about 22-23 students. When she needs students to use technology, she sends them to the media center with assignments and instructions, or waits until she can bring the whole class. Her classroom has a Promethean board which she used extensively until February, when the projector bulb burned out; it still has not been serviced.

When students dismissed for lunch we met for about fifteen minutes to talk about ways to use technology to support figures of speech. Ms. T was still excited about having used *Edmodo* for a book discussion when we were out for a "snow day" in February, so we talked about ways to use *Edmodo* in greater depth. When I returned to the media center I identified several online games and websites for her students to use to practice metaphors and similes; I was especially jazzed about "[Fling the Teacher](#)" because I know her 4th graders will enjoy it. I will follow up with Client Support to make sure her Promethean Board is on the docket for prompt repair.

Skill and Affective Changes:

In terms of Ms. T's instructional practice I think she is amazing – students are engaged and she brings each one into the.

At this point in time she is using all her skills to make up for the lack of technology equipment in the classroom for daily student use. This session represented more traditional lecture-style instruction even though students were responding. For this lesson my involvement is more with observing Ms. T's "normal" classroom and offering technology resources and support for her classroom technology challenges

Reflection on Challenges and Solution:

I was very impressed in seeing Ms. T in action in her normal classroom setting. I was especially interested in the way she used the "I Can" statements to engage students in instructional objectives. This is a practical strategy I could use in my own classroom that would help focus students as well as helping me stay on task and wrap up! As a coach, I could never hope to deliver content instruction as masterfully as Ms. T. does. I might have included some kind of exit ticket for homophones & homographs.

This session illustrated the modeling approach to coaching, described by Knight (2007) as "I watch you, you watch me." Today I was definitely watching Ms. T to learn about her classroom and approach to instruction in preparation for my assistance with instruction. In my experience, Atlanta Public Schools' instructional coaches (IC) occasionally drop into classrooms and teach a model lesson, sometimes even without prior scheduling, and only rarely do they first spend time in the classroom observing a teacher's normal instruction. Although that approach has some relationship to principles in explained in Instructional coaching: a partnership approach to improving instruction (Knight, 2007), what that approach typically lacks is the ongoing, collegial partnership relationship. Occasionally the IC will contact a teacher to ask what lesson or technology she needs to see modeled, but more often even the model lesson is simply delivered as one of a menu of strategies. Centennial Place is actually fortunate because our IC is very responsive to our requests for assistance with specific strategies.

3rd Session: March 10, 2014 (8:30-9:30am)

Strategies:

Today in Ms. T's ELA classroom students were working on their group final projects. Students were working in assigned collaborative groups to compare and contrast other examples of literature with *Because of Winn Dixie*. Each group had to select or write an original example of a poem, drama, or narrative that compared with the main idea of the story. Each group also had to write one or two paragraphs comparing their narrative selection with the story. As media specialist, I had been working with groups of students to find resources that supported their choices. When I visited the classroom, I carried with me a collection of picture books, a rhyming dictionary, and a book of "poemstarts" called *Read a Rhyme, Write a Rhyme* by Jack Prelutsky (2005). Since I knew that most groups were writing original poems about dogs, I modeled with the students brainstorming about poetry ideas using the strategies from that book. We made lists of nouns, adjectives, and verbs descriptive of dogs, and then used the dictionary and rhyming dictionary to find synonyms and rhyming words that fit into each group's brainstormed list. Students wanted to jump right into writing words that rhyme, so it was important to help them first identify what they wanted to express about dogs. Although usually I would not attempt content instruction, I do know about vocabulary and language to help improve writing. Ms. T. observed me working with the whole group and then we both helped the small groups with whatever they needed. I left the resources with Ms. T to use with other class groups throughout the day.

When the class dismissed, Ms. T and I reviewed work that students had already submitted and talked about ways to extend the activity and incorporate more technology. Students have been creating their documents collaboratively using Google Drive, and Ms. T has been editing and commenting on their work in real time in Google Drive. I suggested we could extend the activity by asking each group to choose some part of their final project and post it to their class group so everyone could read it. Students could also comment on each other's work. This would give them practice with technology,

publishing, editing and commenting – higher levels of Bloom’s taxonomy.

In preparation for the *Edmodo* phase of the final group project, I agreed that I would set up *Edmodo* groups for the other 3 ELA sections and create the assignment. We agreed to spend all day March 24 with this activity in the media center – Ms. T will bring all her ELA classes to the media center. Students would have turned in their group projects by March 21 so they would have work to post. I would demonstrate to students how to sign up and join a group, how to post notes and attach documents, and how to comment on each other’s work in *Edmodo*. Ms. T will bring completed student work and their resource materials.

Skill and Affective Changes:

Although Ms. T and I collaborate on many lessons, this was the greatest level of collaborative interaction we have enjoyed. Typically we discuss an upcoming ELA lesson and then I support students as they work. Prior to this class session, she had given them the assignment and then set them to work without as much instruction about the writing process. This time Ms. T was also able to take advantage of the resources I brought and use them with other students, and this helped them think more deeply and critically about their projects. My poetry brainstorming session helped Ms. T see another way to support their writing in greater depth, and helped students develop additional vocabulary they could also use in their other dog-related writing as they worked on drama and compared narrative works.

Reflection on Challenges and Solution:

This coaching session challenged me to get more involved in daily instruction. Not being a content-classroom teacher, I do not usually have to focus on objectives and strategies related to a testable content area. Taking charge of the brainstorming and development phase and leading student work in this class forced me to stretch my understanding and teaching ability. At the same time, I was able to demonstrate a different strategy for teaching writing, focusing on vocabulary and language with practical ways to get students’ ideas on paper. It is always challenging managing the class group, but I found it especially challenging to get each group involved in the brainstorming activities. I think this session especially helped me think differently about what I do relative to what traditional classroom teachers do, and I can incorporate some of those strategies more. This coaching represented the “you watch me” part of modeling instruction described by Knight (2007) while at the same time addressing content instruction in a way different from how I usually teach in the media center. I think I will develop a library lesson for April about brainstorming for poetry writing, using reference resources, and have students then share their original work on *Edmodo*, since all 4th and 5th grade student are now beginning to use *Edmodo* for different classes.

4th Session: March 24, 2014 morning (8:30-9:30am)

Strategies:

Today’s coaching session focused on the use of technology, *Edmodo*, as a way to publish and discuss work. The session was intended as an example of how to engage students with technology, and Ms. T and I set that as our observable goal. Ms. T brought the first class to the media center for their weekly 1-hour visit, along with their resources. I modeled using the Promethean board to demonstrate *Edmodo* to students, starting with how to sign up and join the group. In order to minimize the number of user names and passwords students need, we advised them to use their network user names and passwords to create *Edmodo* accounts. I showed students where the assignment was posted and read through it with them, and also how to post a note and how to attach a document. Ms. T spread out all their completed projects on the big tables for them to use. Of course, when students scattered to the computers to log in there were practical problems. Ms. T and I made sure students had their group ID, but we had to remind students to work close to their teammates so they could choose what to post. Students needed their projects and resources at the computers, and they needed to be able to

access each other's work. For example, even though students had written together, they had actually saved the files under one group member's workspace so that student had to first share the files or e-mail them to classmates. Once students got past that hurdle, however, they dove into the work, making it more manageable. Groups quickly decided what to post and uploaded their files, and then students commented on each other's work as assigned.

Skill and Affective Changes:

One thing that quickly became apparent to Ms. T is that using technology at this level, with each student working individually, requires a tremendous amount of planning. Although she is excited about embracing this tool, we both recognize there is a fairly steep learning curve in implementation. Therefore, setting our goal of using this first group for experimentation the medium was useful as a pilot extension of the original project assignment. When we discussed the activity after the students had logged in and posted something, she said she needed to hurry back and get the rest of her students' projects and resources, because she hadn't realized they all would need them. Ultimately all 25 student groups will share some of their work from this final project on *Edmodo*.

Another thing Ms. T realized was that management is an issue when kids are scattered about the room working at different levels, even when they're all working on the same project. In her classroom or even in the tech lab the room is more manageable, but multiple users prompt multiple simultaneous questions. It is helpful to get more tech-savvy students involved in helping each other learn the practical aspects. We also should have expected another issue, because it happens a lot – students forget what they named a file when saving it, which then makes it difficult for them to retrieve or attach the file. I need to instruct all students to use a standard naming convention when saving files.

Again, Ms. T was struck with the realization that all students were energized and engaged by publishing their work for others to read, and by the opportunity to read and discuss other students' work. She said she plans to use *Edmodo* as a management tool from the first day of school next year, and will incorporate it much more in Spring quarter.

Reflection on Challenges and Solution:

This coaching session could have gone a little more smoothly – I will create some "quick sheet" handouts with simple instructions for students. Classroom management is always an issue, but is something that just has to be anticipated in a big room. One way that might have made the first part of the activity go more smoothly would have been to enroll students in the groups beforehand and give them their log in information, however, we chose to have each student sign up individually, which was a little more time consuming. Also, students should have first met with their groups and decided what they would share, instead of first logging on to the computer. I have to be careful when working with both students and teachers not to assume too much knowledge, and make sure steps are clearly explained and planned out. In the next session, when Ms. T is going to instruct students how to join *Edmodo* and share their work; hopefully she learned from watching me what not to do as well as making sure she covers important instructions. She is much better than I am at giving directions to students. This session definitely reflected a peer coaching strategy and partner relationship – Ms. T and I are equals and peers, and we both bring different strengths to the lesson and to support one another. Our professional discussions and exchange of strategies help improve instructional strategies as well as helping each of us become better teachers.

5th Session: March 24, 2014 (11:00am-12:00, 1:30-2:30pm)

Strategies:

Ms. T brought her 3rd and 4th period ELA classes (one after the other) to the media center to share their projects on *Edmodo*. With me taking a supporting role, she gathered all the students at the Promethean Board and demonstrated the

steps for signing in and joining a group. She took the time to explain the entire assignment, starting with explaining that the assignment was posted on *Edmodo* for students to read themselves. Then she explained that each group would need to collect their finished project, which was on the table, and decide what they wanted to share with the rest of their class. She reminded students that everything they type on *Edmodo* can be read by everyone else in the class, so it is important to stay on topic. Finally she released students to work on the computers in groups, starting with those students who had not used *Edmodo* before and would take longer to get started. This made the activity much more manageable. I took the supporting role throughout her lesson, helping students with technical issues that came up. Again, once students signed in, the biggest challenge remained being able to share documents that had been saved on another students' workspace. This time we advised group leaders to e-mail copies to other members of the group before starting to post any work.

Skill and Affective Changes:

Ms. T clearly used challenges faced in the morning sessions to develop practical strategies to manage the afternoon groups. She has become more comfortable with giving students instructions about technical applications for *Edmodo* to make sure that all students understand what is expected of them when they collaborate and share their work in a class forum. After several class meetings, Ms. T has developed an understanding of planning for all the steps and phases of implementing technology as a tool to inspire student engagement. She also developed an interest in what other features of this particular tool she can use next quarter. For example, she suggested that I do a workshop on *Edmodo* for other staff members, and asked that I include information about creating quizzes and polls since she wants to try that next.

Reflection on Challenges and Solution:

Although the initial assignment was for each group to share an item on *Edmodo* and give group members' names, it became apparent that each student wanted to post something. In each collaborative group each student had worked on a different part of the project, so they were proud of what they had done and wanted to share the part they had completed. Again I am reminded that Ms. T is a much better classroom teacher than I am, and understands the importance of scaffolding instructions step by step and managing classroom activity. Her decision to release groups one by one to start working made the afternoon move more smoothly by the last class, even as we faced time limits. This unit in its entirety illustrated our partner relationship and demonstrated peer coaching, as we collaborated and exchanged ideas about ways to improve each session to make sure that all students were successful.

Coaches need to remember that each teacher, each student is completely different and has different needs, and that what works for one class might not go well in another group. This activity, over several weeks, worked well and inspired students and Ms. T to try different tasks. It has also inspired other teachers, as Ms. T has raved about how excited and engaged her students were and how thrilled she was with the quality of their posts and comments. Several teachers have recently suggested that we take on school-wide use of *Edmodo* as a management system next school year in the upper grades.

Although most of this coaching relationship has focused on using *Edmodo* with a 4th grade English Language Arts class, it has been made clear that implementing technology and using a coaching relationship can be most effective when focusing on one topic or tool at once. Coaching allows teachers to benefit from intensive support in one aspect of their teaching, and at a time and place that is most effective for them. It would not have been effective for me to suggest trying a different strategy in each session or in different classes, but it was effective to scaffold each successive activity on another. Even in the sessions that were a little scattered, we were able to apply lessons learned and improve the next session.

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